



The Mitchell Report

Why Baseball's * Won't Hurt \$

Tom Van Riper, 12.14.07, 6:00 AM ET

So the jig is finally up.

The Mitchell Report shows it all. The backroom dealings, the needles, and most of all, the names. The five-year-old steroids issue that's been plaguing Major League Baseball, was all laid out in excruciating legalistic detail by its namesake, former U.S. Senator (and federal prosecutor) George Mitchell, who led the investigation into player use of performance-enhancing drugs.

Roger Clemens, Andy Pettitte and Miguel Tejada all land in the report, which relies heavily on evidence from former New York Mets clubhouse attendant Kirk Radomski, cooperating with the Mitchell group after being busted for selling drugs last year. Radomski told the group of selling steroids or other performance enhancers to many current and former major leaguers, backing up his claims with canceled checks in some cases.

In Pictures: 10 Stars Named

"For more than a decade, there has been widespread illegal use of anabolic steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs, in violation of federal law and baseball policy," Mitchell told reporters in New York Thursday. He revealed that 5% to 7% of players who agreed to random testing in 2003 wound up testing positive, though he figures the actual usage rate to be much higher, since drugs like Human Growth Hormone can't be detected in tests. Bud Selig, baseball's commissioner, made vague promises to punish. "If action is needed, action will be taken," he said.

Quite a hit to the game's image, but probably not owners' wallets. There's little chance profits will dwindle as fans cancel their season tickets and stop tuning in on television. Revenue and ticket sales set records right through this year's controversial home-run chase, in which so many frowned at steroid-suspect Barry Bonds breaking Hank Aaron's all-time record.

"I think it's clear that the business will not be negatively affected," says industry consultant David Carter of the Sports Business Group. "People have factored in their thoughts about this and are spending accordingly."

And they're spending like never before. Baseball has set attendance records for four years running, even while fighting an ongoing image battle over steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs. The league's 30 clubs combined for \$5.1 billion in revenue in 2006, a 9% jump over the previous year. The game's \$496 million in net profit was the most ever. (See "[The Business Of Baseball](#).")

The public has known about baseball's steroid "problem" for a few years now, and no one has stopped buying tickets. Thursday's revelation of more individual names doesn't really add much. Most of the players in question, like Mike Stanton, Rondell White and even Roger Clemens, are older veterans closing in on retirement. The inclusion of Yankee pitcher Andy Pettitte brought some initial shock and disappointment, though a close look at the report shows that he's only accused of taking Human Growth Hormone one time in 2002, when he was nursing an injury--no big ongoing scandal there. Tejada is pretty much the only star still in his prime who's named in the report.

The revelations over steroid use may have sent a lot of moralizing sports columnists into hysterics, while turning Commissioner Bud Selig into a punching bag who's now straining for damage control. But the fans--the game's

actual customers--just don't care.

Sure, some might shake their heads in dismay a little bit and feel a bit put off over having to rethink the record book. But they don't care enough to tune out. Does anyone think baseball fans are suddenly going to spend their summer nights watching bass fishing or *CSI: Miami* reruns?

Ticket sales keep going up, and non-stop coverage of last week's winter meetings shows the public is eating up off-season player-transaction news.

"Fans still enjoy the game, just look at turnstile count," Carter says.

It's pretty clear that scandals can only afflict so much damage, no matter the sport. Just as the Atlanta Falcons still have a waiting list for season tickets in the wake of the Michael Vick fiasco and the New York Knicks increased their season renewal rate after an embarrassing sexual-harassment trial, so too will baseball keep rolling. It's all about entertainment, and steroids just don't have that much juice.

In Pictures: 10 Stars Named