

ARE YOU JUICED?

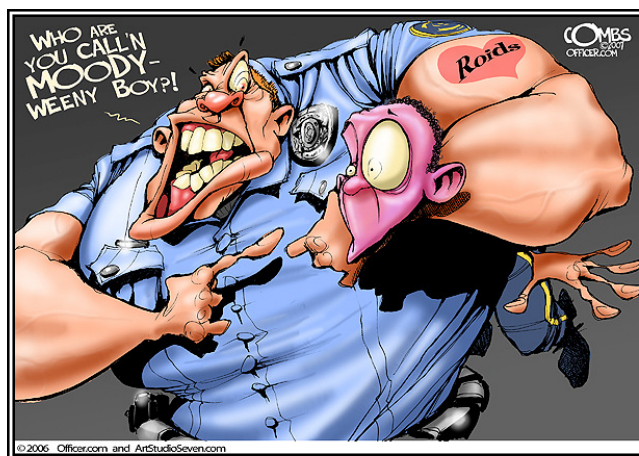
Big, Strong, and Stupid

By John M. Wills

Have you ever seen one of your colleagues, or an officer from another department, who was larger than life? I am not speaking in figurative terms about how he influences his environment. I am referring literally to his physical size. The guy whose biceps are bulging out of his shirt sleeves, with “Popeye” size forearms, veins as big as snakes crisscrossing his skin, seemingly alive. I have seen them; these guys are an awesome sight to behold, almost a caricature of what police officers look like. But it is axiomatic that you can’t always judge a book by its cover.

In the 1990s I took part in the FBI’s first ever undercover steroid operation entitled, “Operation Equine.” I was assigned to the Detroit FBI office at the time. An agent in our Ann Arbor, MI resident agency was asked by then University of Michigan football coach, Bo Schembechler, to take a “close look” at some of his athletes. Bo feared that there was a potential problem brewing with steroids and he wanted it stopped. That was the genesis for a 2 ½ year journey involving myself and another FBI agent working undercover to ferret out those that used and sold “roids.” We got the DEA involved along with the FDA, and the case eventually netted over 70 convictions from small-time-dealers, to those that dealt in huge volumes. In the process, individuals lost money, jewelry, cars, and in a few cases, their gyms. For its maiden voyage into the underground world of juice, “Equine” proved to be an overwhelming success.

Last year, my undercover FBI colleague testified in front of Congress regarding Major League Baseball (MLB) and steroids. He told them of our discovery that MLB players were involved in using the drugs to enhance their performance. One name that surfaced numerous times was that of self-professed steroid user Jose Canseco. In an interview with CBS, Canseco implicated Mark McGuire as well. Canseco, sometimes called the “Bad Boy of Baseball,” wrote a book entitled Juiced. In it he talks about his use of anabolic steroids and human growth hormones. Most recently, the on-going “Balco” investigation involving MLB steroid abuse continues to heat up. The latest twist in the case in April 2007, involves a former New York Mets employee pleading guilty in federal court to



selling steroids to dozens of players. I am certain this case will ensnare more players before it comes to a conclusion.

During the undercover assignment, my fellow undercover agents and I discovered a subculture consisting of gym owners, bodybuilders, and weightlifters that had no compunction about using steroids and other drugs. What we also discovered was that there were some police officers firmly entrenched in this lifestyle as well. As part of our cover we worked out daily, sometimes twice daily, in popular gyms like PowerHouse, Gold's, and the World Gym. Our networking took us all over the United States. During our travels we tried to make as many "friends" as possible, hoping that they would lead us to the dealers. In the process, we learned that the culture attracted cops for a variety of reasons. Some were competing as bodybuilders, weightlifters, and in other sports as well. Those who were truly obsessed about their endeavors bought into the notion that roids would give them that shortcut, that "leg up" as it were, to get them to the top. Indeed, a few were successful, winning amateur events and some even turning pro where the payoff came in money and fame, not just a trophy for the mantle.

Other cops just wanted to "get big." The illusion was that the bigger and stronger they appeared to everyone, the easier it would be to make people comply. The problem is that these guys, and yes, some gals, did not do their homework regarding steroids. While the initial attraction to being on juice is the quick results, the downside is the side effects, some of which are irreversible. One huge, negative impact that these rogue cops didn't count on was the phenomenon referred to as "Roid Rage." Those that were using had a propensity to become easily aggravated and upset. Sometimes these flare-ups occurred in the gyms, other times they happened on duty. Regardless of where they happened, a cop in the throes of roid rage is like a locomotive coming down the track at full throttle. He is almost impossible to stop. Naturally, when these incidents occurred, a brutality beef always ensued. Often times the officer's defense was that he was himself the victim of roid rage. This then was the catalyst for additional drug charges and eventual criminal or administrative sanctions.

Just like their bodybuilding cohorts, the officers succumbed to what I refer to as companion drugs: cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, anti-depressants, and marijuana or alcohol. As their prolonged steroid usage continued, they discovered that they tired easily and needed "coke" to energize them. When they became reliant on the coke and couldn't control the proper dosage, they needed something to slow them down. When they had mood swings they needed "ludes." Unfortunately, these downers also caused dull thinking, reduced judgment, memory loss, and slowed down reaction time. None of these do anything to enhance an officer's chances of survival on the street.

As I alluded to earlier about not judging a book by its cover, we now have the strangest paradox of all...a fit looking, almost super human appearing officer, that if the truth be known, is more unhealthy than most of his colleagues. One of the anomalies involved with getting that magazine look, is that the officer's fitness level actually decreases—especially on the aerobic side of the house. Since their goal is to get big, and in order to achieve and maintain the size they want, they must all but eliminate cardio

from their routine. One guy I befriended in one of the gyms, used to tell me that he would not even get up from his chair to turn the TV set on or off—it would burn too many calories. Another user told me his motto was “bury me big!” They were all obsessed with size.

The irony of course is that while they are trying to increase their size, some very important pieces of their bodies are shrinking. When a steroid user stays on the juice too long, the testicles begin to shrink. Hardly the sign of a virile man... And while the initial stage of steroid usage increases the sex drive, the latter stages almost eliminate entirely the urge to engage in sex. More important than the testicles shrinking, although I am sure that many of my colleagues would argue that there is nothing more important, is the fact that the body’s internal organs are being damaged. High blood pressure, heart disease, liver damage, cancers, strokes, and blood clots are all possible destinations at the end of the steroid interstate. Can you say Arnold Schwarzenegger?

I do not want to paint a bleak picture here. The cops that juice are the exception rather than the rule. In my 46 years of working out at gyms all over the United States, I have encountered a ton of guys and gals that are there for the right reasons. They are role models for the rest of us, as well as the people that they serve with honor each day. Those few bad ones, unfortunately, taint all the good ones that make exercise part of their daily routine, and go about it in the conventional manner. The juicers turn out to be big, strong, and stupid. The rest of us turn out to be fit, strong, and brilliant, for we have figured out the magical equation to balance our lives. Say your prayers, love your family, eat right, and train. Stay safe my friends!

John Wills, an FBINAA member, spent 2 years in the U.S. Army before serving 12 years with the Chicago Police Department (CPD). He left the CPD to become an FBI Special Agent, working organized crime, violent crime, and drugs. John served as the Principal Firearms Instructor, Training Coordinator, and sniper team leader in the Detroit Division for 10 years. Before retiring from the FBI, he spent 7 years teaching at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Virginia. He has taught Street Survival domestically and internationally, as well as supervised new agent training at the Academy. John is presently a field manager in the Training Division with Advanced Interactive Systems, teaching judgemental use of force to police and military. He also owns his own business—LivSafe, teaching personal safety classes (www.LivSafe.com), and lecturing high school and college athletic teams on the dangers of drugs and steroids (www.RoidsandJocks.com); he is an NCAA approved speaker. John is a writer for both print and online publications. He can be reached at john@livsafe.com or (540) 226-9478.

