

## **A former powerlifting champion and British Olympic weightlifting coach...**

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SAN DIEGO -- A former powerlifting champion and British Olympic weightlifting coach who jumped bail after pleading guilty to smuggling steroids was sentenced Monday to 4 years in prison.

Richard Anthony Fitton had pleaded guilty in February to charges of conspiracy to import steroids, importing steroids and making a false statement to a customs officer. He failed to appear for his April sentencing.

Steroids are used by some athletes to increase muscle mass and build strength. They are legally dispensed by prescription but can cause harmful side effects.

Fitton was arrested in August in Albuquerque, N.M., and returned to San Diego to face new charges of bail jumping, failing to file an income tax return and possession of a stamp to alter passports.

He pleaded guilty to those charges last month.

One of Fitton's attorneys, Ron Koch of Albuquerque, N.M., Monday told U.S. District Judge William Enright that Fitton jumped bail after learning federal prosecutors in April planned to seek a five-year prison term.

'He panicked. He just plain panicked,' Koch said.

Fitton appeared pale and drawn in court Monday and told the judge 'this past year has been a nightmare.' He is suffering from liver disease and high blood pressure, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Phil Halpern.

'It's ironic that Fitton is suffering from two of the leading symptoms of steroid usage,' Halpern said.

Halpern earlier said Fitton 'may have been the biggest (steroid) dealer in the world.' He said Fitton's customers included gym owners, fitness centers, trainers and colleges.

'Our investigation has revealed that the use of steroid drugs in sports is widespread, including professional sports and college sports,' Halpern said.

Fitton was convicted in 1982 in Atlanta of illegally importing steroids, but was given a one-year suspended sentence.

'The government is overjoyed that finally a federal judge has seen fit to give a significant sentence to an individual involved in steroids trafficking,' Halpern said.

'It is the government's hope this sentence will serve as a warning to the large number of people who are engaged in the business of selling steroids,' he said.

Fitton and a companion, Victoria Steenrod of Albuquerque, were originally arrested in November 1984 at the Tecate border crossing and charged with illegally importing prescription drugs from Mexico.

Steenrod, a former women's world champion powerlifter, pleaded guilty and was placed on one-year probation. She appeared in court Monday on Fitton's behalf.

Under terms of the Monday sentence, Fitton could be eligible for parole at any time. He was sentenced to 30 months on the three charges stemming from his original arrest and two years on the bail jump charge, with the terms to be served consecutively.

Fitton, a powerlifting champion in 1977, was a coach with the British weightlifting team during the Los Angeles Olympics games. He is still a British subject.

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*Source: United Press International, December 2, 1985. Retrieved from UPI Archives:*

*<https://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/12/02/A-former-powerlifting-champion-and-British-Olympic-weightlifting-coach/5844502347600/>*