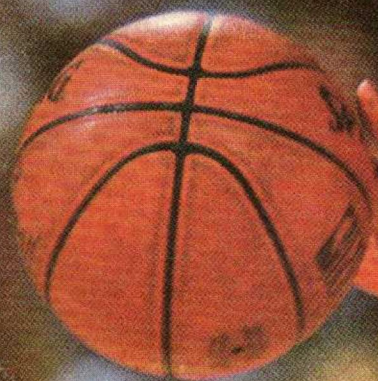


**SPECIAL REPORT: THE STEROID EXPLOSION**

# Sports Illustrated

MAY 13, 1985 \$1.95

## THE MAGIC MAN



**L.A.'s Magic Johnson  
Chases The NBA Title**





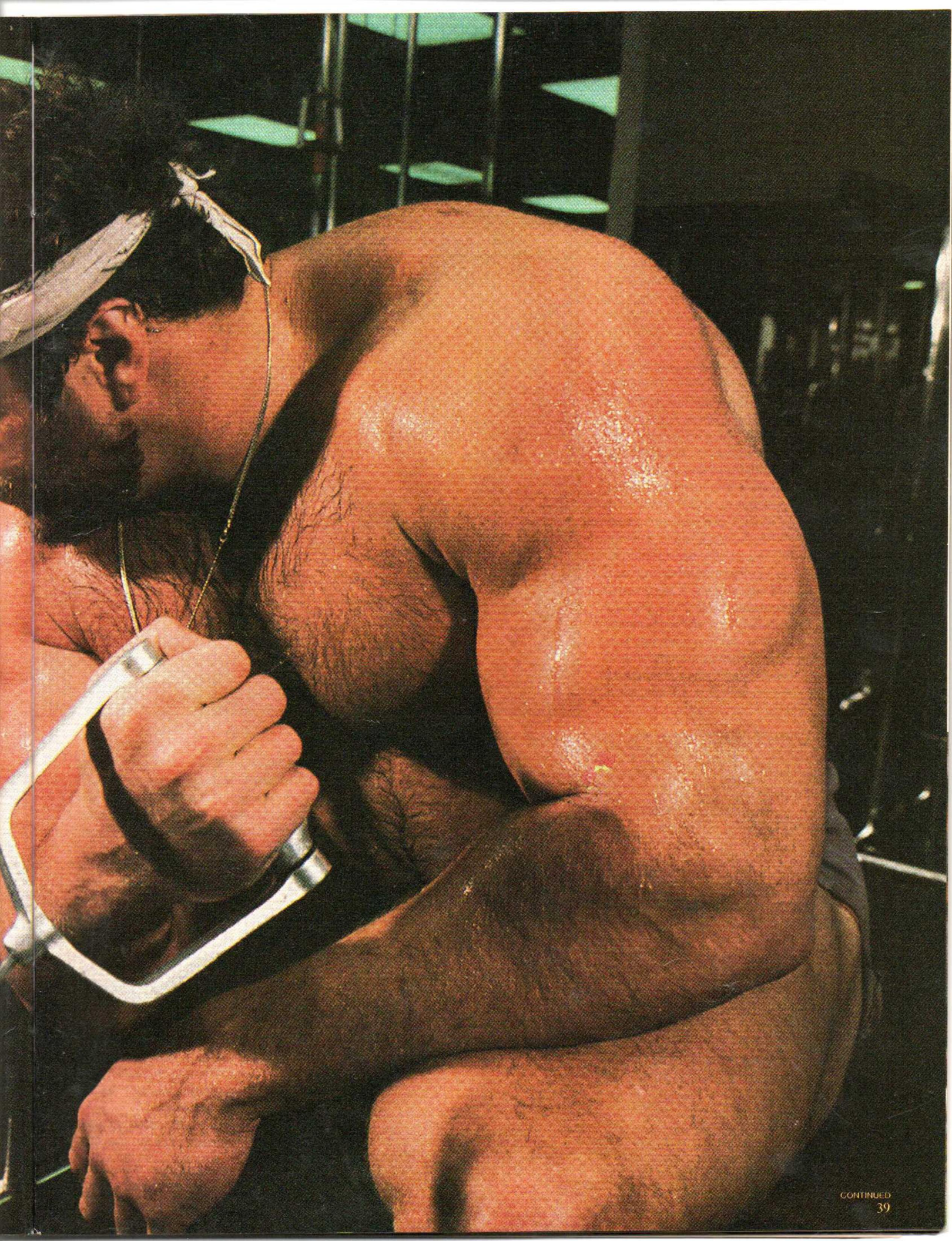
**SPECIAL REPORT**

# **Steroids: A Problem Of Huge Dimensions**

By using anabolic steroids, athletes like the Tampa Bay Bucs' Steve Courson are looking for an edge—and maybe for trouble

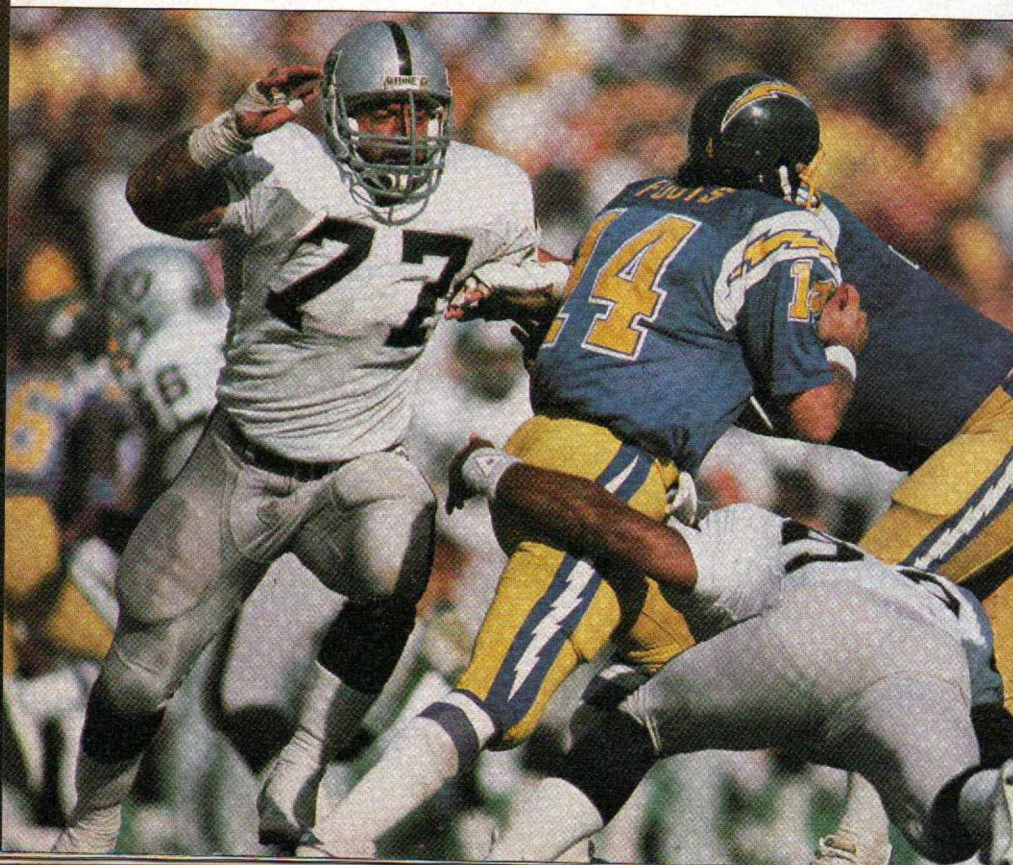
by **WILLIAM OSCAR JOHNSON**

Special reporting by Jill Lieber and Armen Keteyian



It is a spreading wildfire that is touching athletes at every level of sport. From NFL stars to iron pumpers in small-town gyms, from high school bench warmers to college All-Americans, thousands of American athletes, both male and female, are routinely ingesting or injecting anabolic steroids to increase their strength or improve their all-around sense of athletic and personal self-worth.

None of these drugs is supposed to be dispensed without a physician's prescription, yet a veritable cornucopia of them is available on a massive black market so blatant in its contempt for law enforcement that major dealers regularly send out direct-mail advertising and catalogs listing prices and shipping costs. In some instances coaches dispense steroids to players. Players sell them to other players. Some doctors and pharmacists freely prescribe or dispense them to athletes. Owners of some bodybuilding and weightlifting gyms and hangers-on at such places peddle them like chewing gum. Jocks in almost every sport use the stuff—track and field, swimming, boxing, wrestling, triathlon, cycling and, of course, powerlifting and bodybuilding. Tony Fisher, 24, who plans to compete in

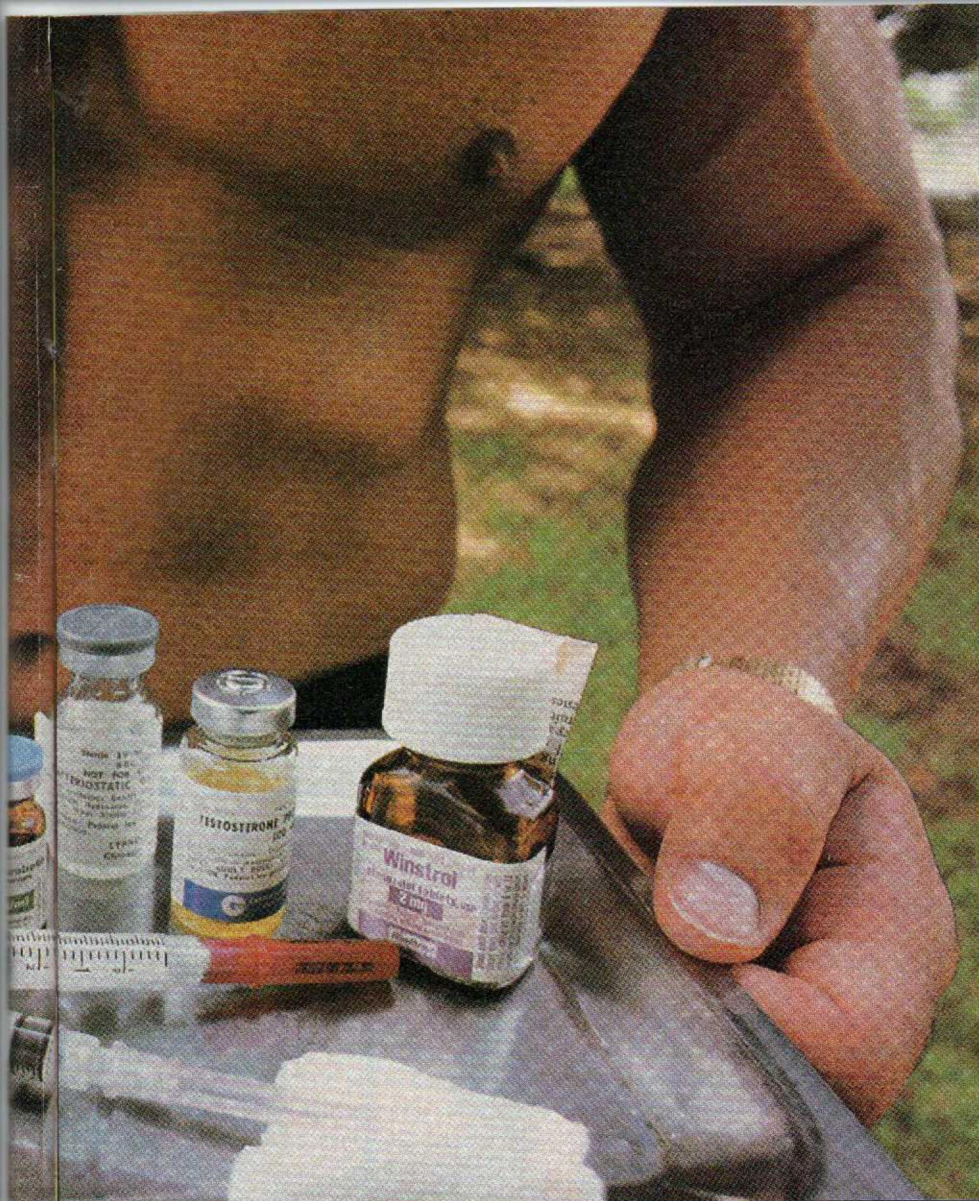


ANDY HART

June for the title of Mr. Pittsburgh, said, "You enter a competition in bodybuilding without using steroids and it's like sending your girl friend into the Miss America Pageant without makeup or eye shadow."

There are also many football players who use steroids, although estimates of just how many vary widely and wildly. Buffalo Bills nose tackle Fred Smerlas says he thinks 40% of NFL players use steroids. Other NFL players put the figure as high as 90%. That is probably on the high side—there's a tendency among athletes to assume that opponents, especially successful ones, are cheating—but it's clear that steroid use in the NFL is substantial, especially among linemen. SI interviewed 25 NFL players, only two of whom admitted to currently using ste-

According to Alzado (77), steroids have long been a fact of life around the NFL.



GARYN LEVY

By prescription or on the black market, the supply of steroids is meeting the demand.

cally identified by teammates or strength coaches as being on the drugs. Virtually all the players said that use by *other* players was epidemic.

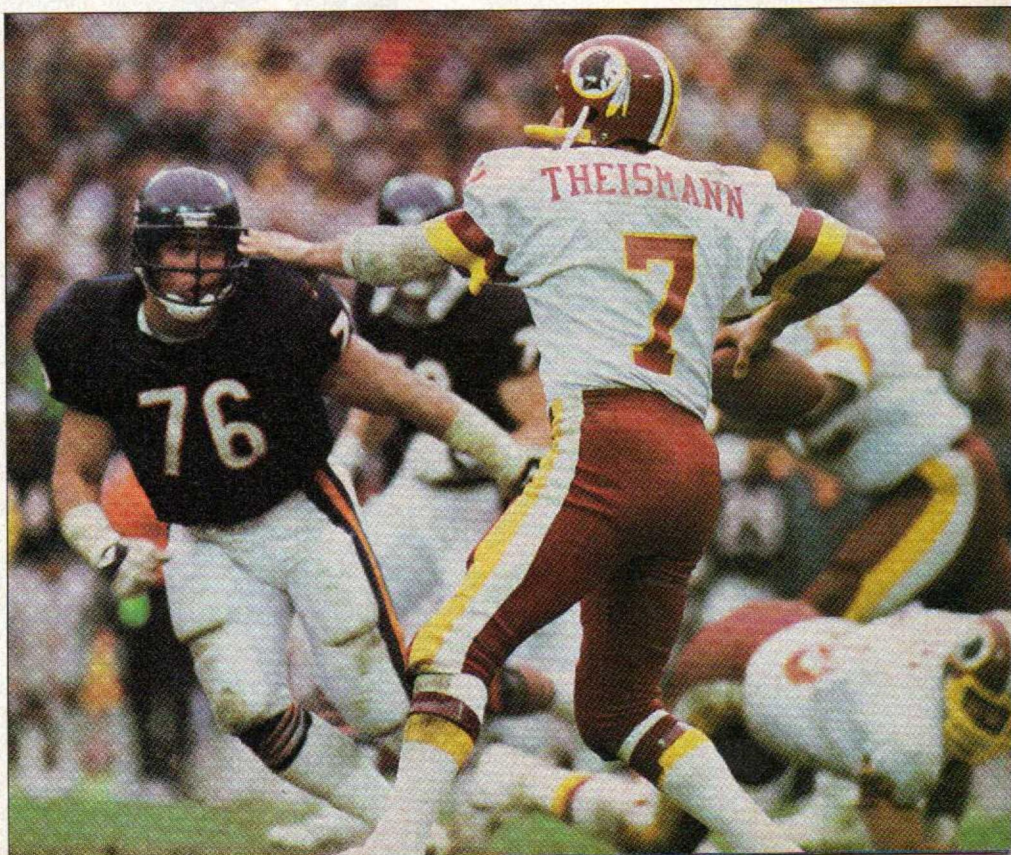
There is a feeling among many athletes that steroid use is as legitimate a part of training as lifting weights and running wind sprints. Some athletes, having taken steroids themselves without visible ill effect, believe that warnings about health hazards are overstated. The people who run sports often don't seem to know what to think. For example, the NFL has a policy against steroid use except for "medical reasons," and commissioner Pete Rozelle says, "If a player is attempting to enhance performance on the field by steroids, it's wrong." But SI has interviewed several NFL team doctors, and none of them could think of a valid medical reason for giving anabolic steroids to football players. Nevertheless, the NFL has made no effort to discipline any player for taking steroids. Rozelle says he doesn't think they're widely used. Gene Upshaw, the executive director of the

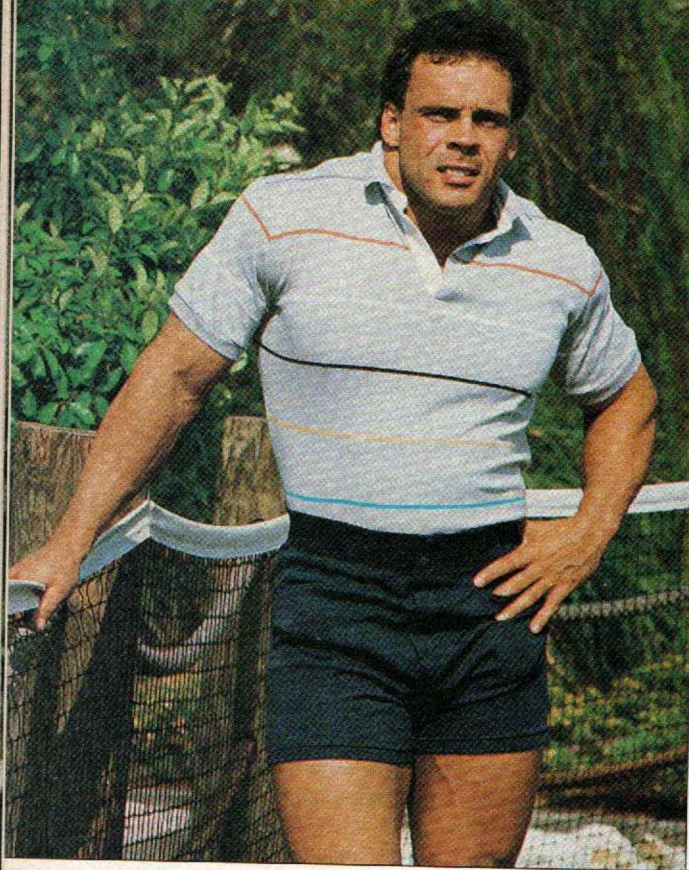
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roids; one was Tampa Bay Buccaneer offensive guard Steve Courson (see page 50) and the other wouldn't allow his name to be used. Two other players, Chicago Bear linemen Steve McMichael and Jim Covert, said they had taken them for a brief period in the past. The remaining 21 players either denied using steroids or refused to comment. However, one of them, Washington Redskin offensive lineman Rick Donnalley, was quoted by *The Cincinnati Post* in 1982 as admitting having taken steroids (and, according to Courson, who was then a Pittsburgh Steeler teammate of Donnalley's, "got his ass chewed out" by coach Chuck Noll for talking about it). Many of the other players had suspiciously detailed knowledge of steroid trade names and "cycles" of use, and several of them were specifi-

The Bears' McMichael (76) says he took steroids after his final season at Texas.

JACQUELINE DUVOISIN





CARIN LEVY

Sandlin says he's a former user who still gets calls for advice.

taining them illegally, possibly exposing them to criminal elements, there's the ethical question of whether athletes should be using drugs to enhance their performances. On the subject of medical ethics generally, B.J. Anderson, the American Medical Association's associate general counsel, said last week, "The position of the physician has to be that it is unethical to provide worthless services that won't aid the health of the patient." Transposed to the world of sports, the ethical questions become clear enough. Should athletes be creatures of the laboratory? Do we want better sports through chemistry?

These questions are particularly pressing in view of the generally uncritical acceptance of anabolic steroids among NFL players. Lyle Alzado, 36, a 14-year veteran NFL defensive end formerly with Denver and Cleveland, now with the Raiders, said last week, "On some teams, between 75 and 90 percent of all athletes use steroids." Not quarterbacks or kickers, he added, but many of the others. "Steroids create more raw power, speed, endurance. Some of the oldtime players have gotten by without using them, but a player cannot compete today at a topnotch level of football without an aid of some sort," Alzado said.

And what about the USFL? Kent Hull, the center for the New Jersey Generals, said, "You can find steroids in every pro locker room. It is not a minute thing. It gets to a point where some guys, especially at the pro level, think they have to do it to make it." A New Jersey teammate, defensive end Jim Byrne, adds: "It's big in the USFL because if you don't make it here, you're thrown right out into the real world."

College football? Charles J.

Genslinger (with his wife, Kathy) has had the steroid highs and lows.

Radler, a former suburban Pittsburgh pizza-shop owner who became the nation's No. 1 steroid dealer (see page 56), was sent to prison in March for dealing in illicit drugs. Radler had more than 700 names on his customer list at the peak of his operation, and when asked in prison the other day how many of them were on college campuses, he replied, "The more I think about that, half had to be sent to colleges, to people on college campuses."

Recent events indicate that steroid use on campuses is prevalent indeed, in spite of denials by many college coaches in football and other sports. Last month 32 Vanderbilt football players, past and present, were listed as unindicted co-conspirators in a case in Nashville involving the illegal sale and distribution of steroids. The Bears' McMichael, who admits to having used steroids after his senior year at Texas, said, "Vanderbilt is the straw that broke the camel's back. There are [players at] a bunch of other schools who are doing steroids, too. The whole college deal has gotten out of hand." Pat Donovan, 31, a Dallas Cowboy offensive lineman for nine years who retired in 1983, said, "Steroids are very, very accepted in the NFL. In my last five or six years it ran as high as 60 to 70 percent on the Cowboys on the offensive and defensive lines." Donovan said he felt sorriest for the college kids who are trying to emulate the pros. "In the pros the guys are compensated for taking the risk." Donovan added that college head coaches "know about it and encourage the abuse or they look the other way and don't counsel the kids."

Kim Wood, the Cincinnati Bengals' strength coach for the past 11 years, also considers head coaches culpable—in the pro and college ranks alike. "They pressure the strength coaches and say, 'How can we get big and strong?'" says Wood. "Strength coaches justify giving steroids to their kids this way: 'It's my job to get them good stuff, not let them go to some scumbag on the streets.' They say, 'Steroids are the individual's decision,' but somehow the drug seems to always be there."

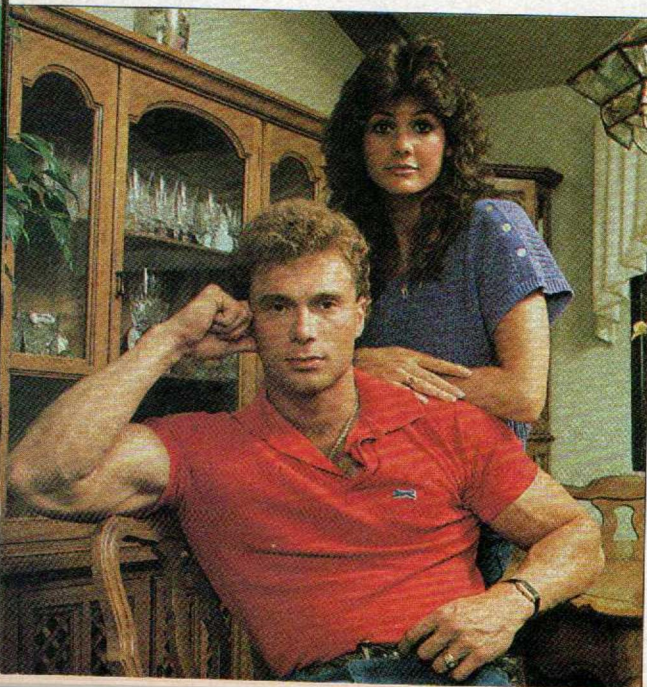
Finally, steroid use also appears to be rapidly increasing among high school athletes. Wood, who's particularly outspoken on the dangers of steroids—he believes that the Bengals are relatively clean—says this sorry development is fu-

continued

#### STERIODS continued

NFL Players Association, who for 16 years was a star guard with the Raiders, also takes a see-no-evil position and issues a string of denials. "I never knew any guys who took steroids." And: "There's no black market of steroids." Again: "I don't think steroids are a problem in the NFL."

But steroids are a problem in the NFL—and throughout sports. Apart from the fact that they do pose health hazards and that many players are ob-

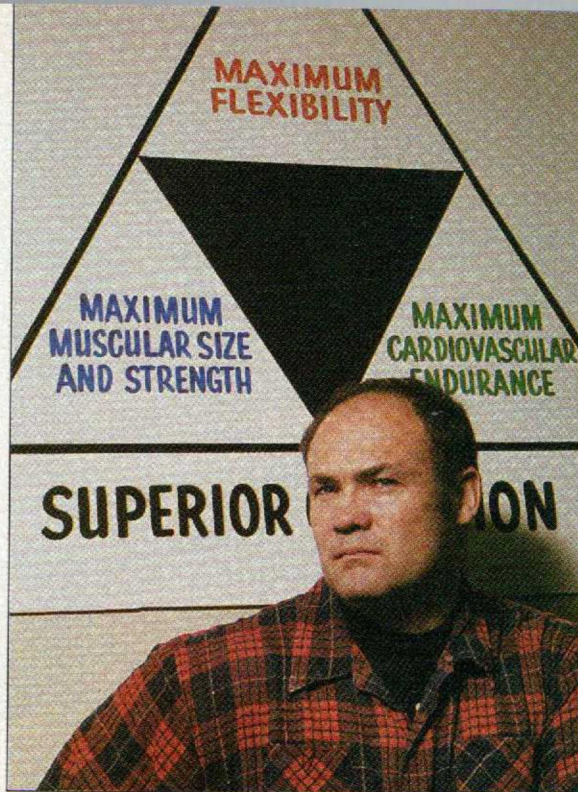


LANE STEWART

eled not only by visions of future collegiate and professional athletic glory but also by growing reliance on steroids as a way of dealing with the self-doubts of young boys about their masculinity. "Unfortunately, this is the kind of problem that most teenagers have, so they can be easily exploited," Wood says. "Steroids have become the thing for kids to do. In the last few years they have become very big in high school."

Just how far and wide has the steroid culture now spread? Richard Sandlin, 27, a former strength consultant at Alabama who has a master's degree in exercise physiology and computer science and is a world-ranked powerlifter, acknowledged that he is a former steroid user and said that he has served as a kind of consultant over the past six years to players, coaches and others interested in getting the lowdown on steroids. Sandlin, who lives in Tuscaloosa, Ala. and has a company that produces medical software for nutrition and fitness programs, says of his callers, "They want to know what type of cycles to go on and how long to stay on the cycle. And they want to know basically what drugs to use, what drugs are harmful, what combinations are harmful, what combinations are best." Sandlin said his answers included accounts of "what happened to me and what could happen to them. I personally have reaped a lot of kidney and liver problems [from steroids]."

Sandlin said that those who have approached him for information include a variety of coaches or athletes, apparently acting on their own, from LSU, Alabama, Auburn, Texas, USC, Washington, Washington State, California, Arizona State, Nebraska, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Texas A&M, SMU, Pitt, Virginia, Clemson, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisville, Georgia, Vanderbilt, Florida and Florida State. He said he has also given advice to at least 40 steroid users or would-be users on NFL and USFL teams, including the New York Giants and Jets, Green Bay Packers, Seattle Seahawks, San Diego Chargers, New Orleans Saints, Los Angeles Raiders, New England Patriots, Detroit Lions, Cleve-



The Bengals' Wood says high schools are affected, too.

land Browns, Atlanta Falcons, Miami Dolphins, Portland Breakers and Houston Gamblers.

The NFL says it doesn't know which, if any, of its teams test players for steroid use. About 20 colleges do, even though the NCAA has no rules prohibiting such use. But Tony Daly, the medical director for the Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee, said it would cost a minimum of \$750,000 to set up an effective testing facility and added that the facility at UCLA used to test athletes at the 1984 Summer Games is the only internationally accredited lab in the U.S. He said, "If you're not using a sophisticated lab, an athlete could use steroids up to 10 days before the test and still have the effects, but his concentrations would be low enough that he would be able to pass the test." The NCAA's Special Committee on National Drug Testing Policy is scheduled to meet on May 16 to formulate a national testing policy. In the meantime, most of the schools now testing for steroids do so at local hospitals, and Eric Zemper, the NCAA staff liaison to the committee, admits, "Those places just aren't prepared to test for steroids."

For young athletes the question of whether or not to use steroids is inescapable. More than ever before, their answer is likely to be yes. As Courson, who says he spends "a couple grand a year" on steroids, put it, "I think everybody faces the question: Do I want to go on [them]? It

happens to everybody at some point in their career. At every level. It's like you're cheating when you use drugs, but then again, everyone else is cheating, too. We'd all be better off if steroids weren't around—everyone would be better off."

But they are around, and have been since 1935, when Charles Kochakian, now an endocrinologist at the University of Alabama-Birmingham, synthesized an anabolic steroid. Anabolic steroids are various synthetic derivatives of testosterone, a male hormone. The drug has been used over the years to stimulate a buildup of the body by synthesizing protein for muscle growth and tissue repair. It is used primarily for those recovering from major surgery or those with chronic debilitating diseases. Today there are numerous anabolic agents, three of the most commonly used being Anadrol, Deca-Durabolin and Anavar. There is also a substance called growth hormone, which is extracted from the pituitary glands of human cadavers and is now also available in synthetic form. Physicians use growth hormone for individuals who are not growing at a normal rate. Consumption of growth hormone in excessive amounts has been known to cause the development of overly large hands, feet and skulls.

The medical profession is still not in total agreement about whether or how much steroids improve athletic performance, even though many athletes believe that they gain the extra strength that enables them to perform better. The risks inherent in the administration of steroids include liver and kidney disorders, hypertension, decreased sperm count, aggressive behavior and impotence in men, and menstrual irregularities and masculinization in women. Some of the side effects are believed by medical experts to be irreversible.

There are also psychological side effects from steroid usage. Steroids are sometimes addictive, producing a sense of supersized manhood that can only be maintained through continuing or increased usage. Scott Genslinger, 28, is a bodybuilder from Pennsylvania who in

*continued*



ing championships and drummed up trade in steroids and other drugs. Radler told federal investigators: "If there's a meet, and Tony's at it, you can count on it that he's got a couple of suitcases full of drugs there that he's going to sell off at that place. . . . He always has a room. . . . They have a long line out in the hall of all the lifters, you know, two pounds overweight still . . . and they got to shoot them all up with Lasix [a diuretic], blow their water off, and they make weight."

Now if only sports administrators and coaches would get as serious about the situation as the FDA and Justice Depart-

#### STERIODS *continued*

October 1981 carried 127 pounds on a 5' 10" frame. By July 1983 he weighed 226. He was one of Radler's customers: At one point he was consuming growth hormone every day, plus a mix of other drugs. "I spent my savings on it, thousands of dollars," he said. "It was an addiction. The way doctors described it to me, it was similar to anorexia nervosa—except you have an obsession with being big instead of being skinny. When I was off steroids, I was afraid to step on a scale for fear I might have lost weight. If I missed a meal, I went totally nuts. It ruined my day." His wife, Kathy, said, "I'm so tired of him asking me, 'Do I look big? Do I look small?' It's annoying."

Insidious as it is, the steroid business has never been better. Much of the stuff is produced in the U.S., but some comes from Mexico, East Germany and England and is either smuggled in or imported legally through customs. There are also many small generic drug manufacturers in the U.S. that have sprung up in the past few years and are eager to feed the growing market. In most states it is a misdemeanor to distribute prescription drugs without a license. State enforcement is often lax. To obtain a license, Radler needed only to fill out a Pennsylvania Department of Health application, be visited by an inspector and pay a \$100 fee. Then he could buy all the nonclassi-

fied prescription drugs that he wanted. Greg Nescott, the Allegheny County Assistant District Attorney, whose office is in Pittsburgh and who prosecuted Radler, said, "Nobody has taken steroids seriously because it's not heroin and it's not cocaine. It's clear now that these things can be dangerous drugs."

One sign that authorities may finally be taking steroids seriously is an unprecedented joint investigation into steroid trafficking now being conducted by the Food and Drug Administration and the Justice Department. Another sign is the case in San Diego that resulted in a guilty plea last February by Tony Fitton, who for the past decade was one of the top dealers in the U.S. Fitton was arrested on Nov. 12, 1984 at a border crossing between Mexico and California carrying 2,040 boxes of Dianabol and other steroids in a rented car. Fitton failed to appear for sentencing and is a fugitive. "He may have been the biggest dealer in the world," said Phil Halpern, the assistant U.S. attorney who prosecuted the case. "Fitton deals at the highest level. His major customers were gym owners, fitness centers, trainers and colleges."

Fitton went to all the major powerlift-

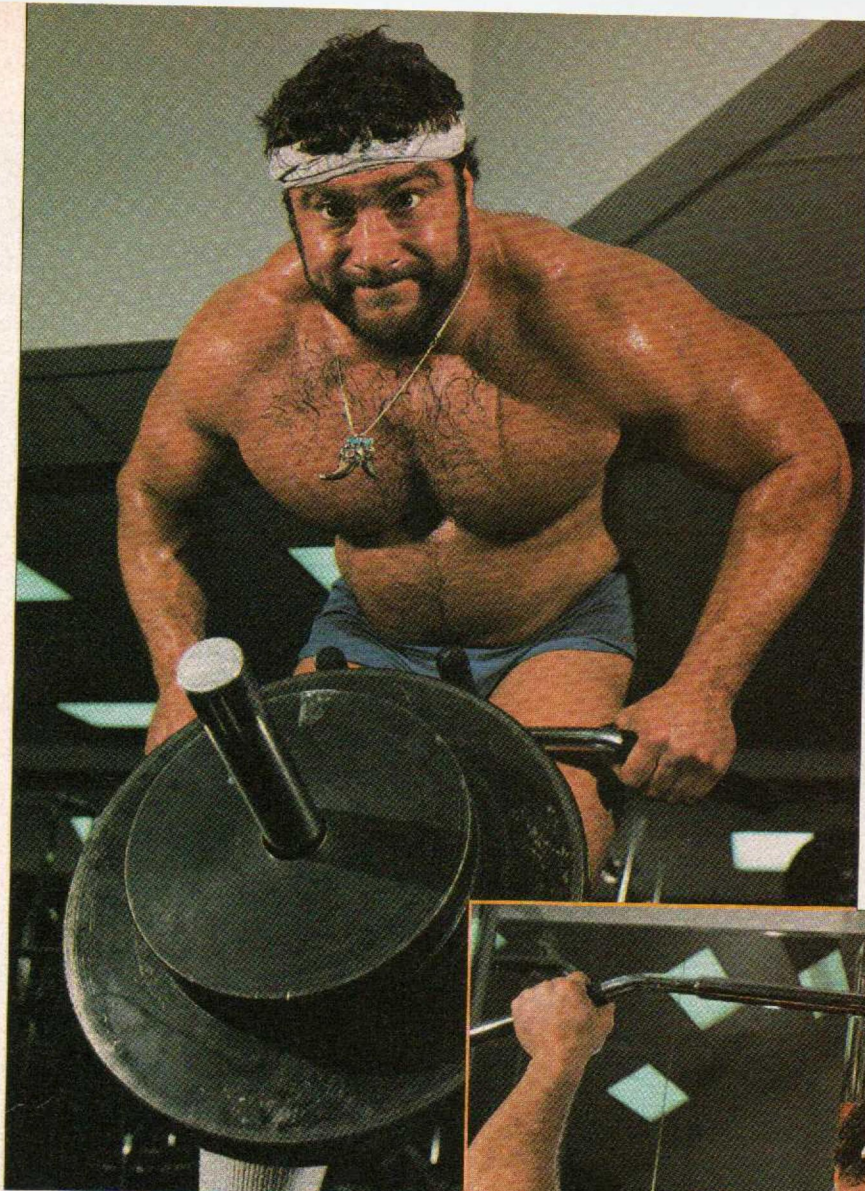


One of the nation's biggest dealers, Fitton is wanted by the Feds, who have a lot of drugs they confiscated from him.

ment appear to be. "I feel confident that steroids are not being dispensed to any heavy degree by the clubs," the NFL's Rozelle insisted last week. "But you can't stop someone from getting them on the outside. We tell them, first, it's debatable as to whether or not it improves your performance and, second, we tell them about potential side effects. I don't think steroid use is that big—with the clubs not dispensing steroids and with athletes not being overly prone to buy it if they have to pay for it." In much the same vein, the NFLPA president, Tom Condon, an offensive guard for the Kansas City Chiefs, said, "Steroids might be a problem in colleges. They might be a problem in track and field. But they're a non-factor in professional football. I've never seen anybody take anything. I don't know about them."

Maybe it's high time that the people who run sports take a closer look.

CONTINUED



CARL WMSAKI

hours telling SI's Jill Lieber about his use of anabolic steroids in his strength-training regimen. He told Lieber, "A lot of guys won't talk about their steroid use. They won't even tell their wives. I'm talking about it because I don't want to be hypocritical, because I believe in telling the truth." What follows is Courson's account of—and rationalization for—his use of steroids:

Seventy-five percent of the linemen in the NFL are on steroids and 95% have probably tried them. Even in college, they're widely used. Rookies, at every training camp, have asked me about them. Most of them have tried some kind of steroid. They've all used Dianabol. I never recommend steroids to high school kids. I tell them they're too young. I say, "Wait until you get everything you can from your body, naturally."



DAVID J. PHILLIPS

Weights aren't enough for Courson, who says steroids help him survive in the NFL.

**SPECIAL REPORT**

*continued*

## Getting Physical-And Chemical

**S**teve Courson, 29, is an offensive guard with the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. He stands 6' 1" and weighs 285 pounds. He was with the Pittsburgh Steelers for seven years before going to Tampa in 1984. An articulate, intelligent young man, he is a military history en-

thusiast who loves the wars of Greece and Persia, and has a large collection of books about World War II. He likes classical music and his van resounds with the taped music of Wagner, Bach, Beethoven and Mozart. Sometimes he switches to Berlitz German tapes. Courson spent 12

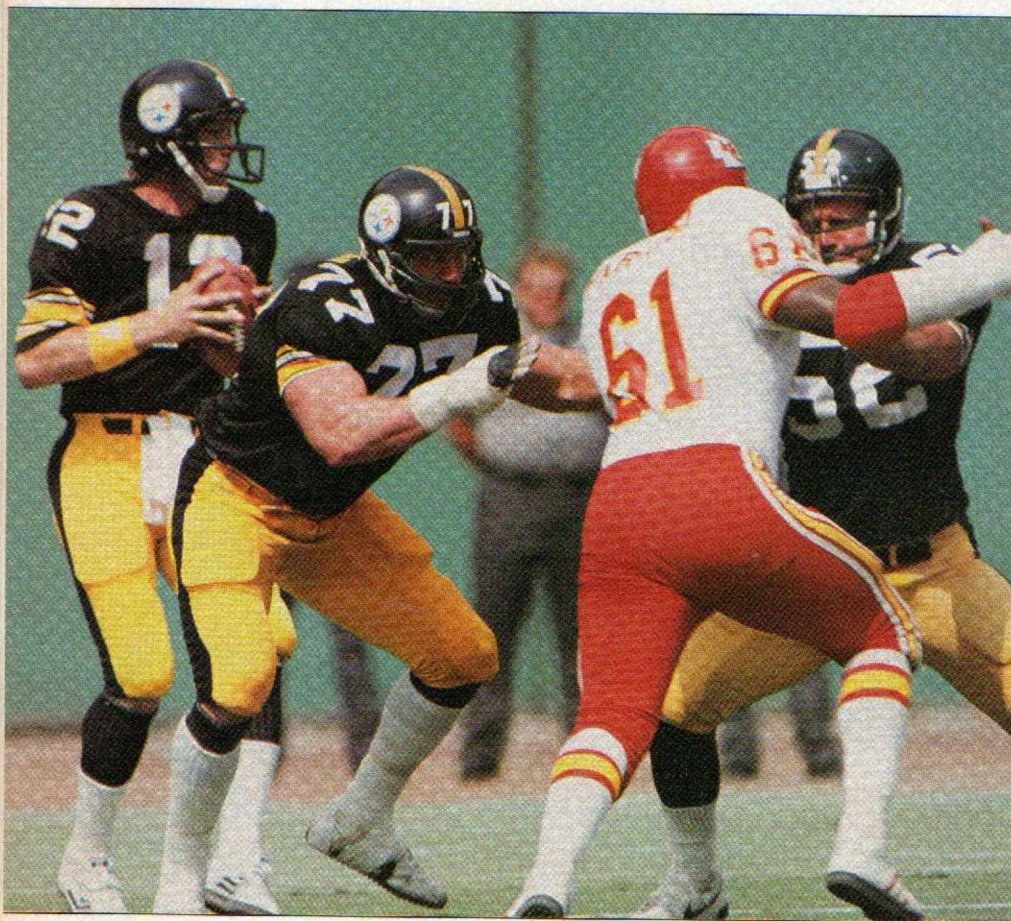
But in football, as in life, only the strong survive. You're preached that by your coaches and your parents from the time you're very young. The strongest people—the strongest athletes—in the world are all using steroids. They're being used not only in the strength field, but also in track and field and in swimming. So you've got to get on drugs if you want to survive.

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My freshman year in college [South Carolina] I got banged around by older, stronger kids. I knew at the time I had to do a lot of work. I knew I had to go on drugs. I wasn't going to be out there just to be out there. I had to be the best. I only did steroids the summer before my sophomore year. My body weight went from 225 to 260 in a month and a half. I didn't

will win out. When I weighed 250 or 260 I could be pushed around by taller, stronger guys.

Steroids are a different realm of drug from speed or painkillers. They enhance your natural ability. They are a building block. They can take you somewhere. I can't condone steroid use, but I can morally accept it as an aid. I know that if I



Courson (77) used his strength and size to keep the Steelers' Terry Bradshaw safe.

need them after that. I was plenty strong enough already. In football, if you use steroids too much, you get muscle tears. You aren't mobile. I don't need them now to gain weight. I'm 6' 1", 285. I can't put too much more weight on my frame. I just want to be stronger. These last three years I did steroids for eight to 12 weeks in the off-season.

Unless you're a freak of nature, you can't get away from that kind of training. It stands to reason, if you have two guys, one on either side of the line, and each weighs 250, the guy who's the stronger

don't use steroids, I won't be the best I can be.

I'm sure there are a lot of football players doing less steroids than I do. For football players, I'm probably doing a lot. Bodybuilders and powerlifters are doing much, much more. I'd take more, too, but I'm afraid to. First, I don't want to be any bigger, and second, I don't want to lose my mobility.

I use 'roids to build up my strength in the off-season, but I never use speed to play. Guys are out there using speed. Why don't they outlaw *that*? Coaches

say, "Hey, steroids are no good for you." Well, how good is taking a painkiller in the ankle or the knee? The whole thing is hypocritical. What's wrong with a football player building his body as strong as he can with steroids? I know I have to play a 16-game season, and to survive without serious injury I have to be as strong as I possibly can be.

I get more enjoyment out of being in a weight room and training—feeling bigger, stronger, seeing myself improve—than when I've read a book. I will keep doing steroids till I see adverse effects in my performance. I want to be strong, but I don't have room for more weight. I want to dead-lift over 1,000 pounds. I want to bench 600 pounds. No football player has done either. I think I can do that within this year.

I ask other players how much they bench. Usually they ask me first: It's a common measuring stick. [The bench press movement is] exactly like going against a defensive lineman. You try to smack him with both hands, raising his shoulders back. You're trying to buy time for the quarterback. Coming out of a stance is like a squat-lift motion. Force moves from the feet through the hips and back. It comes from your pecs, your shoulders, your upper arms, your hands. You've got to be strong to initiate enough shock. You see his head snap back. It feels good to deliver a blow like that.

I can't believe how big steroids are. And the kids! I can't believe the people who use steroids. They just want to be bigger; they aren't doing it for sport—or business.

I look at lifting weights as building a set of my own protective armor, because what we wear out there isn't enough. You take such a pounding out there, even going against people your own size and quickness. You've got to spend the off-season refitting your own armor. It's like refitting tanks during World War II.

In order to compete at this business, you absolutely have to know the pluses and minuses that come along with using steroids. Maybe kidney and liver disease when you're older.

But you do what you have to do, otherwise you don't have your job. I don't want to leave this game broken and crippled. And I know that, with steroids, I have less chance of being broken and crippled because I will be stronger. Of

*continued*

GEORGE GOMBOVICH

course, anyone who uses steroids wants more research done. We want to know what we'll be facing 50, 60—even 20—years from now. Then it will be easier to make a concrete choice about using steroids. Right now, there's an X factor. You don't know what the X factor is, but you do know you're reaping benefits. In mini-camp [last month] I had Tampa Bay test my liver. I want to know what the steroids are doing to me. I don't have the results yet.

Everyone's cycle is different. It's a chemical thing in your body. When I use steroids, I don't want my weight to go up. I want to increase my strength only. I started on a cycle beginning last January. I weighed 272. I waited until after the season, when I had no bumps and bruises. I needed the time for my body to heal. At the end of the season, your strength is depleted. You try to maintain the strength you reach in the off-season, but it's impossible.

So I came to Boulder [Colo.] to train and got started in the middle of January. I was working six days a week, twice a day. In the mornings, I worked on bench presses, inclines, dead lifts and squats. In the evenings, I worked on assistance muscles, doing leg extensions, triceps, weighted dips. I worked on specific muscle groups, isolated them.

On my first eight-week cycle I did anabolics in doses of descending order. I took Winstrol, that's an oral. I took Anavar, another oral. I took Deca-Durabolin, an injectable. I took the orals every day. I injected once or twice a week. For instance, I injected 300 milligrams of Deca-Durabolin in both weeks 1 and 2 along with 50 milligrams a day of Winstrol and 50 a day of Anavar. [According to a standard textbook, *The Pharmacological Basis of Therapeutics*, the recommended dosage for medical purposes is 50 to 100 milligrams every three to four weeks for Deca-Durabolin, six milligrams a day for Winstrol and five to 10 milligrams a day for Anavar.]

When you're in the middle of the juice, on a cycle, you feel like you could bench-press every day. I haven't, but I feel like I could. When you're in the middle of a cycle, you don't know what can happen in your lifts. You have increases that surprise you. Once when I was on the juice, near the middle of a cycle, I benched six to eight reps at 450 pounds,

then three days later did six to eight reps at 475. That's 25 pounds in three days!

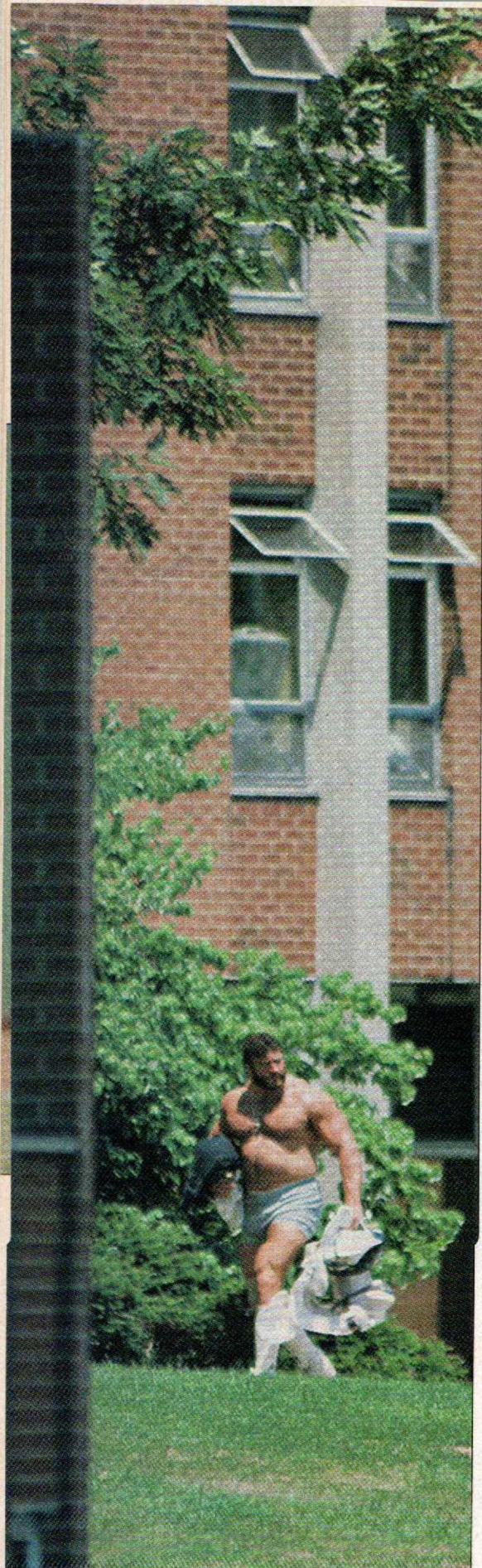
The heaviest cycle I've ever been on was before the last NFL weightlifting contest [a made-for-TV event not sanctioned by the league] in 1982. I took oral Dianabol, Anadrol-50, Anavar and Winstrol. In the last weeks of that cycle, man, I was real irritable. I had bad abdominal cramps. I went home to help my father in the yard, and I was bending over, and I had the worst cramps. I was doing three Anadrol-50s a day, and I cut them out. There were times when I was standing in the kitchen with my friend who's a powerlifter and who injects me, and we said to ourselves, "What are we? Crazy?!" And then I tell myself that I'm doing this just so I can be better at my job.

The only negative side effects I've experienced are that I break out a little on the skin, and I get irritable and very aggressive. You have a shorter temper, so you avoid situations that will aggravate you. Another side effect is sexual. It's *real* bad, although it depends on the individual. I feel more impulsive.

At my size, clothes are hard to find. Suits bind me. I've got to worry about ripping the sleeves out of my shirts. The first couple of years in the league I had everything tailor-made. My measurements are pretty bizarre. My neck, which is the most unusual, is 22 $\frac{3}{4}$ ", thighs 29", calves 18", waist 38 $\frac{1}{2}$ ", chest 58" and biceps 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ ". When you're on a cycle, you can see the changes as they happen.

I've taken my chances with drugs, and I've seen the results. At mini-camp I found out my heart was beating real fast—150 beats a minute, resting. But it can be controlled through medication. Doctors say it is just a temporary condition. I asked two doctors if steroids had anything to do with it. Both said they could have been a contributing factor but they weren't sure. I don't think they were the major reason. I was just burning the candle at both ends, drinking a lot of beer and working out real hard.

Football is my business. I take this attitude toward drugs: They give me an edge in my business. I don't regret anything I've done so far as pharmaceutical use is concerned. It's very easy for people on the outside to criticize. But it's different when it's your livelihood, when it's your job to keep a genetic mutation from getting into your backfield.



Courson strutted at the '84 Steeler camp.

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**B**y the summer of 1983, Charles J. Radler of Pittsburgh was one of the five biggest dealers of anabolic steroids in the U.S., a member of an elite group of operatives, each of whom grossed upwards of \$1 million a year illegally selling prescription drugs to athletes, coaches and smaller dealers. But he wasn't satisfied with Top 5 status: "I wanted to be No. 1 in America. That was my goal."

He succeeded. When he was busted by Pennsylvania narcotics agents in July 1984, Radler was running the most lucrative steroid-dealing operation in the U.S. His records showed he was grossing \$20,000 a week and that in the last nine months of 1983 he had salted away more than \$673,000 in four different bank accounts. And Allegheny County Assistant District Attorney Greg Nescott, who prosecuted Radler, says, "We really don't know how much more he made. He was stuffing thousands of dollars in his pockets." Wayne Babish, the narcotics agent in the Pennsylvania attorney general's office who put the first collar on Radler, says flatly, "At the height of his operation, Charlie was definitely No. 1 in the country."

Charlie Radler is now in jail serving one to two years on 18 counts of illegal sales of prescription drugs and one count of racketeering. He also must pay a \$115,000 fine. He has become the star witness in the joint investigation by the FDA and the Justice Department, and, thanks to his cooperation, the Feds are expected to make moves against some of the U.S.'s biggest steroid dealers.

Radler spoke at length with SI's Armen Keteyian, detailing his career as a steroid dealer. The two interviews took place at the Greensburg State Regional Correctional Facility in southwestern Pennsylvania. Radler is 36, a pale and bloated behemoth of a man, 6' 4" and 285 pounds. He wore a bland brown prison uniform, and his

body sort of sagged and flowed over a swivel chair as he told his story.

The son of a Pittsburgh truck driver, he began using heroin when he was 18 and got hooked on that and alcohol. He began attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in December '74, and saw the light almost instantaneously. "I was in AA for three days, and I made a commitment to God and asked Him to help me and set me free of guilt. I changed. I became honest. I got this job at \$2.65 an hour learning how to cook. I got married,

and I went up to \$2.75, \$3.25 an hour, moving around on jobs in Pittsburgh."

In 1980 Radler opened a pizza shop and around the same time began having trouble with his religion. "There was this God who had, like, saved me out of drug addiction and from being a real scumbag, but now I wasn't satisfied with the things He provided for me. I wanted something they call 'the lusts of the flesh.' Everyone takes those to mean sexual things, but it's also power, success, fame, glory and stuff like that."

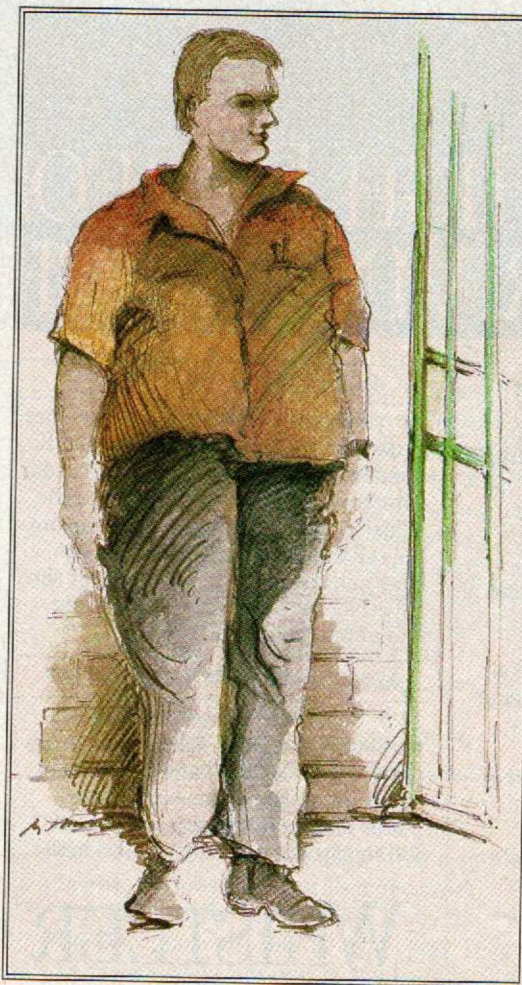
This led Radler to bodybuilding and weightlifting, which in turn led to his bizarre introduction to steroids. "I put an ad in the paper for steroids. Some guy walked into the pizza shop and said he'd get me some. This was around October '82. I was afraid, you know, with my history of being an addict, but then again I justified it." Radler began taking several pills daily from a Pittsburgh doctor who routinely wrote prescriptions for lifters.

Soon Radler was looking for a cheaper way to get drugs. He heard about a drug company in Colorado, and he phoned. "They told me they'd send me anything, and I said, 'Well, isn't this illegal?' They said no, because they were a licensed wholesaler. That caught my attention. I studied the process for getting a license in Pennsylvania. I didn't think they'd license me because of my record, you know; I'd been an addict. But there was a friend I knew in the state police, and he vouched for me. Of course, I was a pretty legit person from what he knew about me."

When Radler started weightlifting in 1982, he weighed 185 pounds. His wholesaler's license came through in January '83, and with his own cut-rate supply of steroids, he increased his intake tremendously and eventually blew up to 310 pounds. His business boomed, too. "With the pizza shop, I was probably making a couple of hundred a week. Then I got this powerlifting magazine, and I looked up names of competition directors in the back. I sent out fliers in the mail to those guys. Then I started getting responses.

"In the beginning we're dealing low figures, like, I'd say from Janu-

## A Business Built On Bulk



GEOFFREY MOSS

continued

ary till June 1983, I was making probably a few thousand dollars a month. Then it just doubled. I couldn't keep up with it. I thought there were a few weightlifters in a few weight rooms who used steroids. Then I started to find out: *Everybody* uses steroids. It's the bodybuilders, the powerlifters, it's about every sport there is. I started getting calls from college football teams. That surprised me at first. Now it would surprise me if there was a college football team out there that isn't using steroids. I'd get all kinds of calls like 'I'm a boxer, what should I do?' I had this illusion I was helping people. I spent hours on the phone passing on information."

At first the business was confined to a bedroom in Radler's house. Then it spilled over into the garage. Eventually, he had 18 employees, his own office building, four phone lines and a huge account with United Parcel Service.

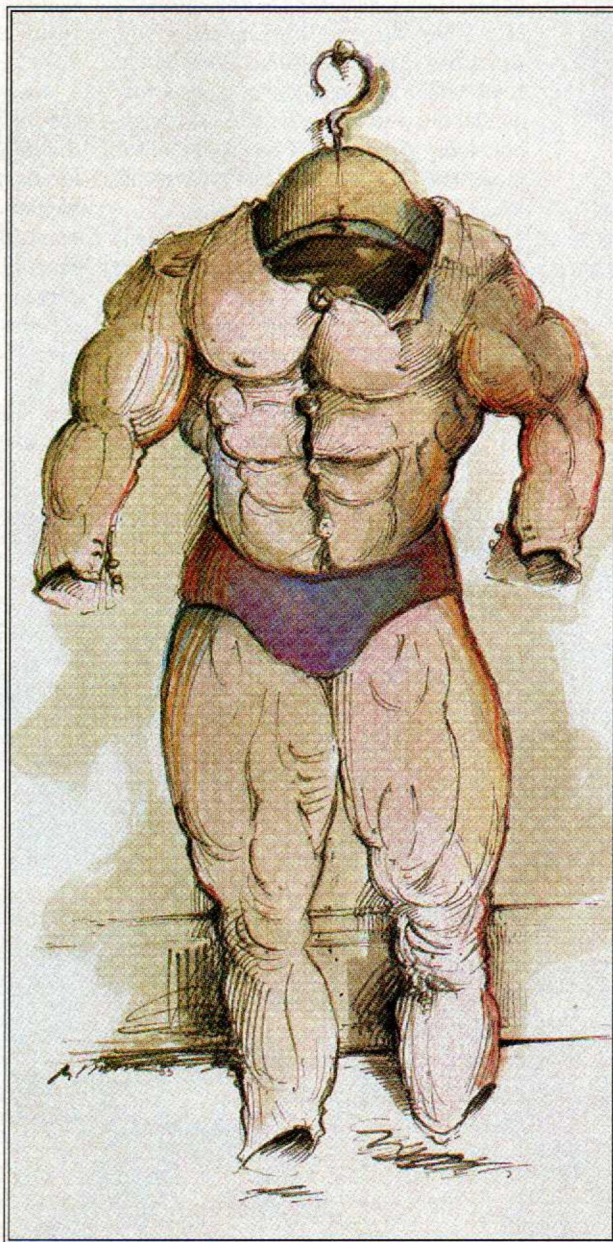
Through the summer of 1983, Radler's reputation was spreading, mostly by word of mouth. Then, in October, *The CBS Evening News* did a short piece about steroids, and the reporter mentioned Radler's operation. Did this wreck the business? Exactly the opposite: "Now everybody started calling us. People were calling up saying things like, 'I saw your ad on television.' Business zoomed."

Charlie Radler was zooming, too, in the fall of '83. "I was loaded with steroids and very aggressive. Sexually, I got much more aggressive, too. I went wild. My marriage was wrecked. Most of the people who had been my friends were staying away from me because I had become so belligerent and arrogant."

While the rest of his life disintegrated, Radler's financial condition was never better. "I had a Cadillac, and I had gold. All kinds of gold chains. A gold bracelet,

a gold watch, a diamond ring. Tons of money. Guns, too."

Then in late November, divine power moved into his life once more: "My wife got born again. I got born again, too. I moved back in the house, and we started to reconcile the marriage. By Christmas,



I had taken everything and thrown it out. I threw into the garbage can at the church close to \$70,000 in drugs."

When suppliers called, Radler sometimes stunned them by saying, "I don't think God wants me to do this anymore."

On Dec. 7, 1983, Babish got a search warrant and raided Radler's offices. He found more than 1,000 invoices for prescription drug orders placed by 437 customers in 38 states and the District of Columbia. A state health department embargo was placed on Radler's supply of drugs. Times were tough for him. Then in May 1984 he decided to start lifting weights again. "I was going to be a powerlifter for Jesus, but by this time we were selling stuff to try to live," he said. Radler went back into the steroid business early last summer. There was a grand jury looking into his earlier dealings. "I figured I was going to need money for an attorney, and I went back and did it again."

On July 19, 1984 the grand jury indicted Radler on 55 counts of selling steroids and the one count of racketeering. Meanwhile, he had started operating out of his house again.

Radler also started using heroin again after having been off it for a decade. "I should have woke up 'cause now it was like Thanksgiving and my wife's due to have a baby, you know. I'm strung out bad on heroin. I didn't know how to deal with it. Then on a Saturday, God made a way for me to get hold of some meth [methadone]. And I quit."

The next Tuesday, Nov. 27, Radler phoned his office and learned that the police were raiding the place. "I panicked. I just hung the phone up. That was Tuesday. So Tuesday night my wife went into labor. Wednesday came, and she had the baby. And when I went to visit her, that's where Babish picked me up. They revoked my bond and slapped

me in the slammer."

Radler offered to turn state's evidence the same night he went to jail. "So I told them I'll tell you what I know about the steroid market in hopes it'll all collapse. I really hope that."

END