

Fish on Steroids?

From the Bay Area newspapers all the way to the web-based *Daily Nation* in Kenya, the talk has been of events allegedly tied to the “Walking Fish.” His past life of playing in the bands “Tower of Power” and “Pure Food and Drug Act” may carry no weight with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which is currently investigating Victor “Walking Fish” Conte and alleged ties of his company, the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (BALCO) to the new chemical entity and heretofore-undetected steroid substance tetrahydrogestrinone (THG). THG is not a dietary supplement – it is an injectable steroid. Nevertheless, THG and dietary supplements will now likely become the poster children of “guilt by association.” Numerous athletes have tied their names and endorsements, directly or indirectly, to Conte and his supplement program based on pristine blood and urine analysis. The list of players promoting Conte’s so-called dietary supplement products include pro football athletes playing with the Broncos, Raiders, Falcons, Jaguars, and Dolphins. As this journal goes to press, more than 20 elite athletes potentially have involvement with THG, including world-class runners Regina Jacobs and Dwain Chambers, and shot-putter Kevin Toth. More than 100 athletes are expected to testify in the federal grand jury probe – by invitation of course.

“Balco’s official line of business is the provision of nutritional supplements to leading athletes all over the world. They include American sprint queen Marion Jones.” (Sulubu Tuva, *Kenya Daily Nation*). “... Jacobs had been taking nutritional supplements provided by Victor Conte, who established BALCO in Burlingame, California.” (Dick Patrick, *USA Today*). Whether or not Conte and BALCO are found guilty or innocent of the allegations, every news story includes the damning declaration that potentially the greatest steroid scandal in history is somehow associated with a dietary supplement company. On the day of this writing, entering “tetrahydrogestrinone” into the Internet’s Google search engine resulted in 1,560 “hits,” with stories in multiple languages. Once again, we see that you cannot put the genie back in the bottle once it is out.

No doubt, the staffers of U.S. Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL) are presently planning their work schedule around pointing the largest possible finger at the dietary supplement industry and its inherent evils. Sen. Durbin’s Dietary Supplement Safety Act of 2003 (S.722) – his “evils-of-ephedra” bill – could potentially sweep-up many safe products if it were unnecessarily enacted into law. Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Tom Harkin (D-IA) have stated many times that the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act of 1994 (DSHEA) contains all the language necessary for proper regulation and enforcement. DSHEA simply needs to be fully implemented by the FDA. In an effort to rationally deal with the situation, Sen. Hatch, along with Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE), has introduced the Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 2003. This bill would ban THG, as well as derivatives of another controversial substance, androstenedione (“andro”).

As far as THG itself, no story to date has mentioned who the chemist is that synthesized this molecular marvel with built-in degradation of its chemical signature when subjected to normal sample preparation for blood or urine analysis. THG will not affect nearly as many lives, nor will it change a generation, as did the 1954 work of Richard Piotech, unless its legacy becomes oppressive legislative change in the dietary supplement industry. An ironic twist attributable to an offshoot of the “Pure Food and Drug Act?”