The first 10 years of the 21st century will largely be remembered as "the steroids era" of Major League Baseball and professional sports in general. But poised to enter a new decade, the dietary supplement industry can only wonder: were the actions taken last year a passage to an improved steroid mop-up?

Back in September, we saw steroids on the Senate floor with a hearing on "hidden steroids" in bodybuilding supplements, held by the Senate Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs. Largely focused on the lengthy process taken in scheduling anabolic steroids, prominent figures from the dietary supplement industry voiced demands for reform and increased regulation.

Ultimately, December came with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA; Washington, DC) classifying boldione, desoxymethyltestosterone (commonly known as madol), and 19-nor-4,9(10)-androstadienedione as Schedule III anabolic steroids under the Controlled Substances Act. You might recognize madol from its presence in Mass Xtreme, one of the products seized in a federal raid on American Cellular Labs last year. The latter of these steroids received attention when football player Shawne Merriman was suspended for a quarter of the San Diego Chargers' 2006 football season due to alleged traces of nandrolone found in his urine. Does the shutting down of these prominent steroids suggest that dietary supplement regulation is starting to ramp up?

Dan Fabricant, vice president of science and regulatory affairs for the Natural Products Association (Washington, DC), notes that the move looks good for the industry. "We were excited to see DEA use the additional power we worked with many others to give them to list these three new substances," said Fabricant. "As stated during September's Senate hearing, the DEA anticipates that after these first steroids are scheduled, it will be easier to follow up with more enforcement and in greater frequency. We look forward to that."

But cynicism surrounding the speed of scheduling these and other steroids still lingers. Industry figures, including Fabricant, repeatedly stress that regulatory agencies, DEA and FDA, have had adequate authority to keep illegal products off of the market.
In an interview with Nutritional Outlook, Travis Tygart, CEO of the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA; Colorado Springs, CO), maintained his concern. "This action highlights the ineffectiveness of the legislative process," said Tygart, noting that madol first became a public concern in 2004 when it was identified as a designer steroid by the famed anti-doping scientist Don Catlin. "It's crazy to think that designer steroids can take that long to be classified. And chemists can create these pretty easily. When the process takes five years to schedule, there is no disincentive in the market to stop making them."
Nonetheless, the tail end of last year proved that there is interest on the hill—and in our communities, too.
In December, USADA unveiled its Supplement Safety Now initiative, a grassroots campaign aimed at motivating Congress to improve regulation of online and retail sales of dietary supplements. The initiative, which will propose draft legislation soon, is supported by the National Basketball Association, the National Football League, Major League Baseball, the U.S. Olympic Committee, and a slew of other national sports organizations.

Source URL: http://www.nutritionaloutlook.com/articles/proceed-caution-0

Links: