

THE TIJUANA CONNECTION

By Dr. Greg Shepard

Last summer my son and I were waiting patiently to get back into the United States. After touring for one hour in Tijuana, Mexico, we'd had enough and I anticipated no problems with the border guards. Finally, it was our turn and we told the guard that we were from Salt Lake City and were tourists. He then asked what I did. Proudly, I stated that I was a coach. His eyes narrowed rather menacingly and looked in the back of our rental car. He saw a suitcase which I hadn't taken to our hotel room as yet. Being a coach with a suitcase was enough for that border guard to order us to a close search area.

At first, I was not a happy camper but then I saw an opportunity to ask some questions. Sadly, the guard thought I was worth checking closely for steroids because I was a coach. After identifying myself as a publisher of a magazine and showing them a recent anti-steroid article, the guards become very responsive to my questions. I saw dogs sniffing for illegal drugs and one man handcuffed and taken away in my 30 minute delay. Before leaving, I had interviews set with Bobby Cassidy head of public relations for the U.S. Customs Office at the Federal Building in San Diego and with an undercover agent who headed up the infamous 1987 sting operation which resulted in the largest steroid bust in history.

Federal indictments were handed to 34 people in that bust. Hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of steroids were seized at border check points and from aliens entering the United States illegally.

The steroid ring was begun, according to my source, by David Jenkins a former Olympian. He got his steroids from Juan Javier Macklis who owned two laboratories in Tijuana, Mexico. Even though these labs and Macklis were named in the 110-count indictment by the United States, it didn't mean much in Mexico. Conspirators in this steroid ring admitted they controlled 70 percent of the U.S. black market business. Those black market steroids found their way into high schools, colleges and gyms all across the country.

Pat Jacobs, an assistant strength and conditioning coach at the University of Miami, was arrested after agents seized steroids, hypodermic needles and cash from an apartment near San Diego.

Jenkins was eventually given a six year sentence and Jacobs was obviously terminated at Miami. However, since steroids are legal in Mexico, Macklis laughed at U.S. authorities. He was invited to appear on 20-20 and continued his arrogance. Under pressure, the Mexican government agreed that Macklis needed to be stopped primarily because of his TV appearance. "He was stupid," said the undercover agent.

Juan Macklis, age 50, was president of Laboratorias Milano and was found guilty of counterfeiting steroids

after his labs were closed down. Not only did Macklis supply steroids to the American smuggling ring, he also had a retail outlet in Tijuana where anyone could buy them. In Mexico, no prescription is needed for steroids. Finally, even the Mexicans grew tired of Macklis' lying ways. His son was arrested and Macklis himself was slapped with a million dollar fine last year.

The undercover agent, who must remain anonymous, said the fine was easily paid by Macklis and he's quite sure he has set up new laboratories in another big brother city. When I suggested Juarez as a possibility, the agent declined comment.

Steroids are still available for anyone to buy at drug stores in Tijuana but they are harder to get and the border guards have really seen a drop off. Penalties have become much stiffer. It is now a federal law that providing steroids to a minor will result in a six year felony indictment. It is a three year felony just to have steroids for sale. The San Diego office is committed to prosecute all cases lending credence to the possibility that Macklis would rather smuggle steroids into Texas.

I asked the agent about the person who comes to Tijuana to purchase steroids only for himself. He responded, "Recently a 19-year old was arrested, who said steroids were hard to get in Los Angeles. It is standard procedure to seize the vehicle. This young man had to call for a ride from the border and pay for towing and storage fees. The worst thing, besides his fine, was being arrested and convicted. He had wanted to be a police officer and now he can't."

What people don't understand is that U.S. Citizens attempting to re-enter the United States don't have their customary rights. Extensive searches can be done without any warrants. X-rays can be ordered at anytime as well as body cavity searches done by medical examiners. The border patrol can pretty much do what they want. As a U.S. citizen, when you come to the border, you are asking permission to re-enter. If you're a smuggler, they have been given some unique powers.

It must be emphasized that Juan Javier Macklis cares nothing for an American steroid user. The only thing that matters is the money to be made. There is no quality control in Macklis' drug lab. If that isn't bad enough, false labels are then put on bottles and containers. The unwitting buyer of black market steroids in an American gym had no idea of what he's getting. One can only imagine the lack of cleanliness in these Mexican steroid labs. Ask yourself, "Would Macklis be concerned over rat droppings in his lab?"

Black market steroids are predominantly sold in gyms. It is where teenagers get them. Doctors aren't the one's prescribing them or even monitoring their use. Steroids have become like other street drugs. It is a scary, scary business. Steroids: Short term high—long term low!