

The Shocking TRUTH About Supplements

Make sure contaminated supplements don't put your health and athletic career at risk

Athletes, you know pressure: you're expected to excel, win and keep on winning. So you train hard, you push yourself to your limits and you look for ways to give you an edge. You probably know athletes who are taking food supplements in the hopes of enhancing their performance. You might be doing it yourself. At the very least, you've probably thought about it.

The reasons athletes and trainers give for taking supplements include improving endurance, decreasing recovery time, increasing strength and being sick less often—all worthy goals. On the surface it sounds like supplements are the way to go, but it turns out there are significant risks related to contamination of these supplements. Before you make the decision to supplement, it's wise to look at the potential impact of contaminated supplements on your athletic career.

What Supplements Won't Do

Food supplements for athletes include a wide range of products, from sports drinks to energy bars to tablets and pills such as vitamins, amino acids, creatine, minerals and various herbal products. A lot of hype goes into marketing these products to athletes, but the fact is poor athletic performance will not always be solved by supplementation.

Supplements will not make up for poor training or practice habits. They will not compensate for nutritional deficiencies or toxicities caused by a generally inadequate diet. And they cannot fundamentally change your physique. (Only anabolic steroids can radically change your muscular makeup, and you know how we at BFS feel about the dangerous effects of these drugs.) What supplements can do is

give you the edge you need to pull ahead of the pack. On the other hand, they can create a world of trouble for an unsuspecting athlete.

The Stian Grimseth Story

Norwegian weightlifter Stian Grimseth was a favorite to win a medal in the 2000 Summer Olympic Games. Grimseth is a legend in his home country, and at the time of the Olympics he had numerous sponsors and product endorsements contracts, earning him hefty fees. Everything looked good for Stian until he was suddenly thrown off the team, escorted from the Games and sent home. He subsequently lost sponsorship and endorsement deals, as well as his reputation.

Grimseth's previous drug tests had all been negative, and this time he insisted that he had not taken any illegal drugs and that there must be another explanation for the positive drug test result. His suspicion immediately fell on a supplement called ribose that he had begun to take shortly before the Games. The supplement was manufactured by Universal Laboratories and was expected to improve his performance. The ribose

Grimseth took allegedly stated on the label that it was "Guaranteed Quality—Laboratory Tested." Even with that clear assurance, Grimseth checked the ingredients with his coach and a doctor on the Norwegian Olympic Committee.

Encountering no objections, he took the supplements.

After he was thrown out of the Games as a result of his drug test, Grimseth had the supplement tested by an independent International Olympic Committee (IOC) laboratory in Germany. The lab determined that the supplement contained 19-norandrosterone, which is a metabolite of a banned hormone and is an indicator of use or ingestion of the banned drug. As a result of this finding, Grimseth filed a lawsuit against the ribose manufacturer in August 2002, claiming substantial damages due to the unlisted and banned ingredient in the supplement.

While this situation might strike you as far-fetched, it is not. It has long been rumored in athletic circles that supplement manufacturers put powerful, but banned, performance-enhancing substances in



Photo: Bruce Klemens

Chris LeRoux proved that you can be a great weightlifter without drugs when he clean and jerked an American record of 337 pounds at a bodyweight of only 132 pounds. This record had stood for 27 years, and was a world record at the time. Chris is an active coach who advises all his athletes to be cautious about taking any supplements than may be tainted with banned substances.

their new products. They hope that the additions will

bring about great results for the athletes first trying the product. The results would quickly spread by word of mouth, giving the product a solid customer base. Then, the manufacturers can take out the ingre-

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has produced a booklet of banned substances. A free copy of this booklet can be obtained from the WADA website: wada-ama.org

dients and rest on the reputation already established for results. Whether or not this is the reasoning behind contamination or not, the fact remains that such contamination by dangerous and banned substances does occur. This situation has come to be called “inadvertent doping.”

Another victim of such contamination is French sprinter Christophe Cheval, who tested positive for a banned steroid at the Edmonton World Championships. His food supplement, allegedly taken to remedy a magnesium and iron deficiency, was found to contain nandrolone, which is banned.

The Extent of the Problem

The IOC has been concerned since 1997 about the possibility of performance-enhancing contaminants in food supplements, given the lack of FDA scrutiny of such products, in contrast to the scrutiny given drugs. (Clearly, FDA approval does not mean a drug is always safe, as indicated by the recent controversy surrounding Vioxx. It can, however, indicate

that manufacturing standards have been met.) Given this concern, the IOC retained an independent lab to evaluate the ingredients in 634 nutritional supplements from 215 different suppliers in 13 countries. The results were shocking.

The lab results indicated that fully 14.8% of the supplements were found to contain prohormones that were not declared on the labels. These banned prohormones were of 11 different anabolic androgenic steroids, primarily of testosterone and nandrolone. When the excretion rate of these prohormones was evaluated, the results showed con-



centrations exceeding the IOC cutoff limit for several hours—a positive doping result. But this isn’t the only problem athletes need to consider.

Aside from contamination worries and the risk of destroying an athletic career, supplements can vary enormously in potency from one product to another and from what is stated on the label. Lab results consistently show that supplements are notorious for not containing the indicated active ingredients in the concentrations listed on the labels. If you are going to pay good money for supplements, you want them to contain what you paid for, right? Otherwise, what’s the point? And certainly, you don’t want them to contain disagreeable additions.

Choosing the Right Supplement

If you have decided supplementation is for you and your diet is healthy and well rounded, how can you be certain you are getting what you paid for and are not risking inadvertently taking steroids or other substances banned by anti-doping groups? Well, you



g₃ = g + 3

g = Gac fruit
3 = 3 other superfruits:

- Siberian Pineapple
- Chinese Lycium Fruit
- Cili Fruit

gac superfruit juice
with lipocarotene

750ml - 25.35 fl oz


Athletes should purchase supplements from companies guaranteeing that their products are pharmaceutical grade, such as those by Pharmanex®. To learn more about these safe and effective products visit www.bfs.mypharmanex.com.

can't. As Rich Wanninger, the director of public affairs and communications for the US Anti-Doping Agency, says, "You take a risk of a positive result every time you take a dietary supplement." Even after such a warning, you may decide you want to take the risk. If so, your best option is to reduce the risk as much as possible by using common sense and choosing reputable dealers.

If you have decided that a particular supplement might be helpful to you as an athlete, consider subscribing to a consumer service that evaluates supplements for just such a purpose according to IOC standards. ConsumerLab.com (CL) has tested products for purity and accuracy of labeling at the request of the US Olympic Committee. The results of these initial tests are available on CL's website at www.ConsumerLab.com. CL continues to test supplements of all types to evaluate which are safe for athletes to take. These results are available for a low subscription price. (CL's stamp of approval is also available on tested products passing the non-contamination tests.)

CL found that creatine, amino acid products, glucosamine products and various others helpful to many athletes showed significant problems. However, it also found that products manufactured by Pharmanex, Ajinomoto Co, Inc., and Usana passed the test in 2003. CL currently tests all types of supplements from fish oils to arthritis products for purity and efficacy. This source can be invaluable to an athlete trying to make wise supplementation choices. If this service isn't the solution for you, consider purchasing your supplements only from companies guaranteeing that their products are pharmaceutical grade, such as those by Pharmanex.

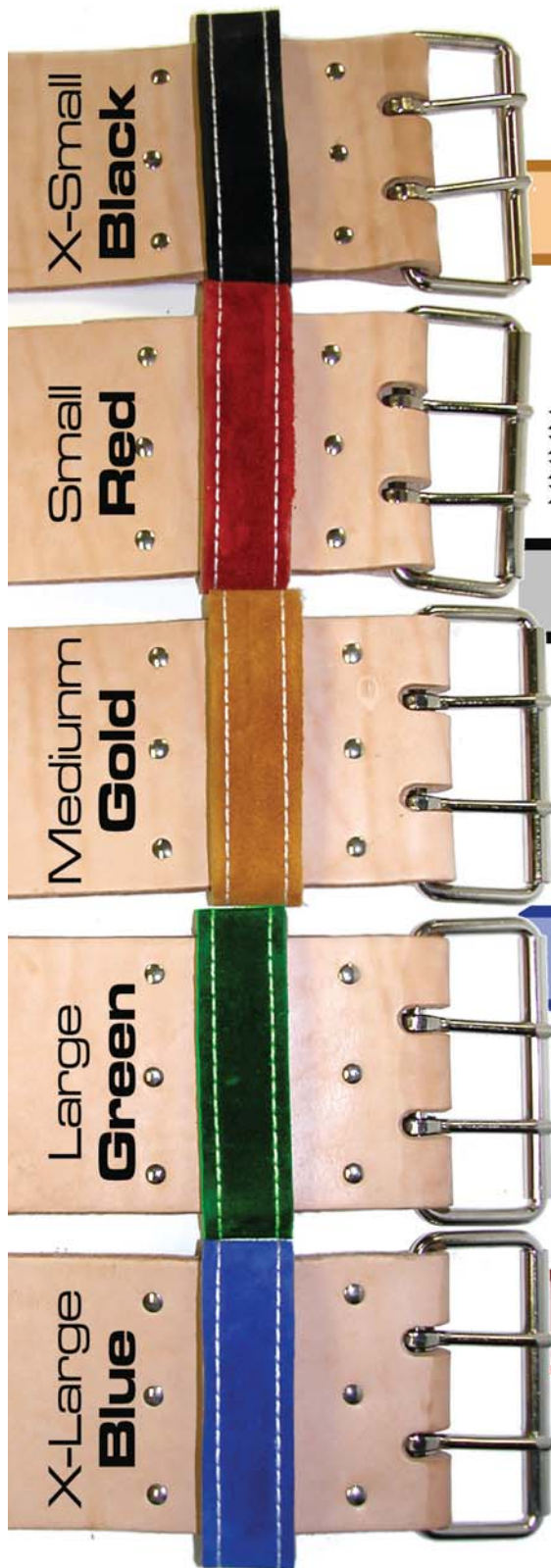
Although the ribose supplement that apparently dashed Stian Grimseth's 2000 Olympic dreams stated it was "laboratory tested," this doesn't mean it was tested under adequate standards. In contrast, a *pharmaceutical-grade* label indicates that the supplement is manufactured according to the high purity standards of drugs. If you are buying from a reputable company making such a claim, your chances of getting exactly what you paid for are high.

As an athlete, you will always be responsible for the negative consequences of your actions, from training lapses to bad supplementation or doping choices. If you decide appropriate food supplements could be helpful, make sure you carefully evaluate them beforehand. After all, your goal is to improve your performance, not jeopardize your health and your athletic career! 

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