

## Multi-billion Dollar Baseball Industry Largely Behind Steroid Abuse By MLB Players

A newly published research paper has revealed that the widespread use of illegal anabolic steroids among Major League Baseball players has been fueled by an "economy of bodily management", exploding television revenues, and the free agent market.

Sarah Rose, a labor and disability historian, said commentators have obscured the more salient issue by attacking morality of individual ball players. The UT Arlington assistant professor said Baseball is representative of the fact that Americans increasingly live in an age of biotechnology in which bodily modification for profit has become the norm and, often, an unstated job requirement. Rose, director of the University's Minor in Disability Studies program, is the co-author of a new article "*Bionic Ballplayers: Risk, Profit, and the Body as Commodity, 1964-2007*" that was published in the journal *LABOR: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas*. Her co-author is Joshua A. T. Salzmann, assistant professor of history at [Northeastern Illinois University](#).

During the research, it was found by the researchers that players' average salaries soared to \$16,000 in the mid-1960s while the league minimum salary remained at \$6,000 between 1954 and 1967. It was revealed that teams paid these increasing salaries out of funds attained through television revenue. Revenues from television contracts rose between 1964 and 1979 from \$21 million to \$54 million. During this time, owners and players investigated new ways for preserving and eventually enhancing players' bodies.

Rose and Salzmann interviewed notable figures such as Bob Costas and Nolan Ryan along with a wide array of trainers, general managers, baseball players, team physicians, agents, and union officials with careers dating back to the mid-1960s. The article emphasizes on Sandy Koufax, Tommy John, Frank Jobe, and [José Canseco](#) (who admitted to making use of anabolic androgenic steroids during their playing career in his tell-all book). Canseco had claimed that the large majority of Major League Baseball players used anabolic steroids.

Rose and Salzmann concluded in the paper that enticed by the prospect of riches, players and teams harnessed fitness training, reconstructive surgery, biomechanical analysis and performance-enhancing drugs to reduce wear and tear on players' bodies and, ultimately, radically alter them for profit. They added this interplay between economic incentives and medicine created what we call bionic ballplayers: bigger, stronger, and at times, more fragile than their predecessors.

It was suggested by the study that the question raised by [anabolic steroids](#) is not individual morality but the morality produced by a political economy of labor that calls for both services and body parts rendered. Rose questioned as to why has professional baseball players' steroid use been characterized as an immoral illegitimate bodily enhancement, when other medical interventions, such as 'Tommy John' elbow reconstruction surgery, have been celebrated as career-saving cures. Rose added that while admittedly different, we show that both bodily

interventions arose out of the same dramatic shifts in the business of baseball -- shifts that drove the medicalization of the game and players' bodies.

Beth Wright, dean of the UT Arlington College of Liberal Arts, applauded Rose and said Dr. Rose is making important contributions to the way we understand the history of disability and athletics and the pressure that the sports industry places on its talent.