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FINAL

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Committee on Government Reform
Washington, CD 20515-6143

Honorable Davis, Waxman, and members of the committee:

As a licensed psychologist and more so, parent, I thank you for the honor of addressing the increased use of potentially deadly substances, androgenic-anabolic steroids.

My husband's and my personal interest in your efforts emanates from our son, Rob Garibaldi, who with the exception of his size, had all the makings of a professional baseball player. We were living on the San Francisco Peninsula when Rob was a Little Leaguer, watching with excitement the accomplishments of his local sports' heroes, Barry Bonds and the Bash Brothers, Mark McGwire and Jose Canseco. Their successes fueled his dreams. He had the talent and the desire. To Rob, baseball was life. By the time he reached high school, his skill at baseball was considered remarkable. In fact, his dream of playing in the major leagues came very close to reality. Rob turned down the New York Yankees in the 1999 Major League Amateur Draft to accept a full scholarship to the University of Southern California. He played for USC in the 2000 College World Series.

As a teen, Rob was told by all working with him, coaches, trainers, and scouts, that the only way to improve his game was to "get bigger." With the exception of size, he had all the tools Major League scouts considered in a potential draftee: running speed, throwing skills, defensive skills, and hitting skills. "Getting bigger" began with working out diligently and using creatine. Creatine was supplied by a scouting team sponsored by the California Angels when his was fifteen. In fact, this and other performance enhancing supplements, some of which the FDA purport as "food," were given to him throughout his baseball career. We were told they were like vitamins. When weight lifting, nutrition, and supplements did not produce the desired results, Rob was encouraged to obtain and use steroids. Rob obtained his first cycle of steroids after graduating high school. He traveled to Tijuana, Mexico with a friend and within an hour had a prescription and purchased steroids from a pharmacy there for himself and other friends. Rob also implicated his trainer at USC as assisting his use of steroids so as to gain 20 pounds. At sixteen, 5'9" and 130 pounds, Rob was far from being the prototype designated by Major League scouts as desirable. Their goal weight for Rob was 185 pounds. By the 2002 Major League Draft, steroids had made good on their promise - Rob was a power hitter, 5'11" and weighed 185 pounds. But he wasn't drafted. Steroids had taken an insidious hold with scouts commenting he was a "head case."

Even though his dad and I confronted him about his weight gain, upper body muscle development, puffy red face, hair loss, and acne – all symptoms of steroid use – he denied his use. Most disturbing were the adverse psychiatric effects he demonstrated over time – mania, depression, short-term memory loss, uncontrollable rage, delusional and suicidal thinking, and paranoid psychosis – symptoms he never acknowledged as being problems. Prior to steroids, Rob never displayed any of these symptoms. When not on steroids or in withdrawal from them, Rob was a sweet and empathic guy with ambition beyond baseball. When disabled by steroids, his character and demeanor so drastically changed that he was dismissed by the coaching staff at USC as a "behavior problem." During this time no one recognized his symptoms as being something other than an agitated depression or bipolar disorder.

Rob also never thought the known physical consequences as being serious. Having heart or liver disease or being sterile were issues he would think about after baseball. At our insistence, Rob eventually cooperated with psychiatric treatment. He was hospitalized in an inpatient psychiatric unit involuntarily, was prescribed antidepressants and antipsychotics, and went to a residential treatment facility. But his depression was unsurmountable. On October 1, 2002, in his car ½ block from our home Rob shot himself in the head. He was 24.

We support your every effort and implore your continued efforts to purge steroids from baseball and inform and legislate law that guides the general public. Our children are using the same performance enhancing supplements and drugs as professional athletes. Research is showing that at an early age intake of these supplements creates a mind set that prompts steroid use later. Grave misinformation, such as that in Jose Canseco's recent account in his book, Juiced, continues to be disseminated. Because of ignorance, denial of those athletes who refuse to testify without subpoenas, and opinions touted as fact, coaches, scouts, and parents will continue to make misinformed statements to those in their charge. Even though Mr. Canseco states on the first page that steroids are for adult use, youth are not afraid to take the risk of losing their health or lives to emulate their heroes and/or help guarantee a place on a team, a scholarship, physique, or competitive edge.

I have a question: If the federal government has designated steroids as illegal unless prescribed by a physician, why did Major League Baseball have to ban their use before ball players could be sanctioned for using them? Our children are reading Juiced right now; watching Bonds lie right now; getting permission from their role models right now to use. Canseco states and his counterparts imply that as long as you "trust your instincts," "carefully control the amounts," "administer them at the proper time," be "smart, careful, and know what you are doing," full potential can be reached. Dr. Canseco, where is your research? What we know is that without steroid use, Rob's suffering and ultimately, his death would have been averted. How many more youngsters will die questing ego and fame through steroids? There is no doubt in our minds that anabolic steroids caused our son to unexpectedly assault his father and choke him until he was restrained by two men. There is no doubt in our minds that steroids killed our son.

Ultimately, we blame Rob for his use, for surrendering his well being and integrity. He made his choice - and we live with the consequences. However, with his sports' heroes as examples and Major League Baseball's blind eye, Rob's decision was a product of erroneous information and promises. In his mind, he did what baseball players like Canseco has done and McGwire and Bonds are believed to have done. Rob fiercely argued, "I don't do drugs. I'm a ballplayer. This is what ballplayers do. If Bonds has to do it, then I must."

We miss him terribly. In Rob's name and in the name of athletic excellence, we thank the committee for defining and demanding responsibility of those whom are admired and for communicating to our nation that the win-at-all-cost attitude that prevails is much too dangerous a game for anyone. After all, baseball is not life. Baseball is a game.

Respectfully,

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