

■ 27 syringes were found in 13 English prisons in 1987 plus seven intercepted in a visitor's bag. None were tested for HIV.¹ Between June 1986 and April 1987 53 per cent of the 243 injecting drug users tested on reception at Fresnes prison in France were found to be HIV-positive. Among the 82 heroin injectors seropositivity reached 63 per cent.²

1. Douglas Hogg. *Hansard*: 17 March 1988, 1442, col.661-2.

2. Papers presented at the Fourth International Conference on AIDS, Stockholm, 12-16 June 1988, by D. Espinoza *et al* (abstract no.8030) and R. Olin *et al* (abstract no.8036).

■ Analysis of deaths among prisoners released from a Geneva prison showed that 26 died from poisoning in the first year compared to 0-5 in each of the following years. A fifth of all prisoners are opiate-dependent on entry and all the poisoning deaths that occurred within the first 45 days after leaving prison involved opiate-type drugs. The authors conclude that addict-prisoners should be warned that while in prison they will lose their tolerance to high doses of drugs.

D. Harding-Pink *et al*. "Risk of death after release from prison: a duty to warn." *British Medical Journal*: 1988, 297, p.596.

■ By late October a "well users" clinic should be open at the Maudsley Hospital in south London. Modelled on the well women clinics, the new centre will offer a walk-in medical check-up service to drug users including voluntary HIV and hepatitis testing. The aim is to provide an easy-access contact point from which to build a health-promoting therapeutic relationship with drug users and/or to refer them on to other services.

■ Local authority officers and elected representatives have produced separate reports on drug misuse and AIDS. The report from an officers' working group makes a series of recommendations for local authority action.¹ Elected representatives of the national associations for county councils, district councils, metropolitan authorities and Scottish local authorities have formed the National Local Authority Forum on Drugs Misuse. Their first report is meant to introduce local authorities to the scale and nature of the drugs problem and related HIV-spread.²

1. Local Authority Associations' Officer Working Group on AIDS. *HIV Infection and Drug Use*. Association of Metropolitan Authorities, 1988.

2. National Local Authority Forum on Drugs Misuse. *Slaying the Dragon*. Association of Metropolitan Authorities, 1988.

Hogg set to ban steroids

Against the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, it now appears certain that the Government will control steroids under the Misuse of Drugs Act as soon as the technical details can be worked out in consultations with the professions and industries affected.

On 11 September 1987, Home Office Minister Douglas Hogg asked the Advisory Council to consider whether anabolic steroids should be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. The Council's technical committee met on 11 January 1988 and considered evidence from the Department of the Environment (the Department in which the Ministry of Sport resides and which also funds the Sports Council), the Home Office and the Department of Health among others.

To recommend control the Advisory Council had to be convinced that steroid use constituted a "social problem", ie, not just one for sport, but for society in general.

The main evidence for control was put by the DoE, who largely reiterated the points made by Sports Minister Colin Moynihan in his report *The Misuse of Drugs in Sport* published in September 1987 and co-written with Sebastian Coe, Vice-President of the Sports Council. But there was no direct evidence in the report to show that steroid misuse constituted a social problem, though it was clear that the Government considered the battle

against drugs in sport as part of the 'war against drugs' being waged by society at large.

The pro-control sports lobby felt the Advisory Council should take the wider view and not regard drug use in sport as a problem confined to an elite group participating in fringe activities. Sport, they argue, involves everyone from top competitors and officials to spectators, plus ordinary athletes at all levels and the millions of armchair enthusiasts, so a problem for sport is a problem for everyone.

More specifically, they point out that anabolic steroids are being used outside sport among bodybuilders and are circulating in public gyms, adding a different dimension to the argument that steroid use is a social problem. The argument is strengthened by claims that steroid-induced aggression has caused problems for the families of those who used them.

In response to these arguments the Advisory Council's technical committee heard that control would:

- create additional work for pharmacists who would have to apply Misuse of Drugs Act safe custody requirements to steroids;
- spread the enforcement effort too thin, both for the police and the Home Office Inspectorate;
- risk the development of new and more dangerous drugs;
- inhibit research;
- set the problematic precedent of adding non-mood changing

drugs to the Act.

The Advisory Council's committee concluded that the case for control was not proven unless a relationship could be demonstrated between steroids and crime, steroids and communicable disease (as steroids are injected there might be an AIDS risk) and steroids and the deterioration of personal relationships or work performance. These, it seems, were the criteria by which the Council would judge whether or not steroids misuse constituted a social problem.

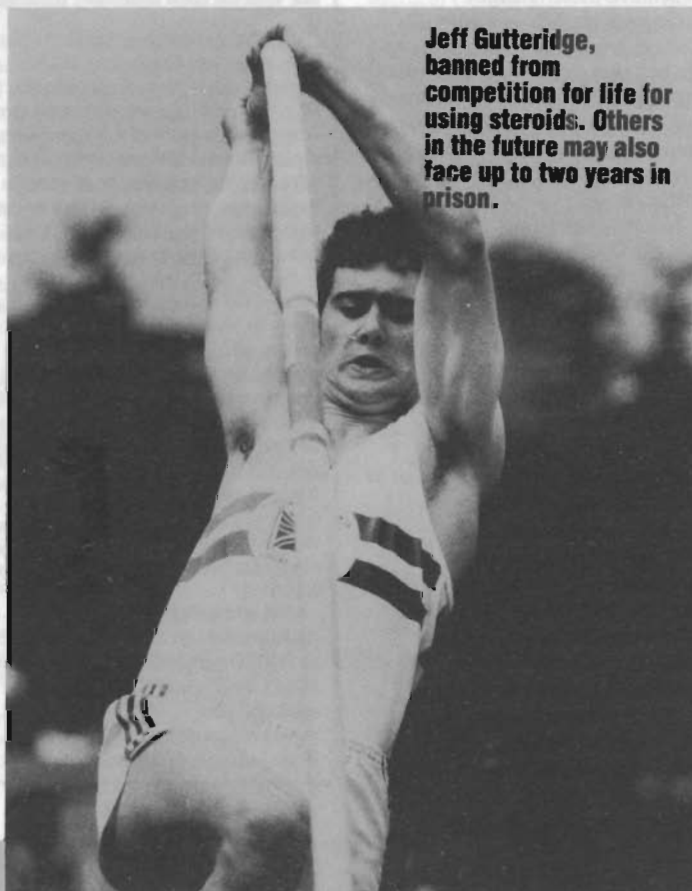
All went quiet until 13 May when (much to the surprise of some of those planning to submit further evidence in support of control) it was announced in the *Times* that the Advisory Council had met the previous day and decided to recommend to the Home Office that steroids should not be controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act. However, the impression from the Home Office was that the Minister was set on control irrespective of the advice.

On 15 September the Home Office issued a press release stating that: "consultations will soon begin with a wide range of pharmaceutical, medical and other relevant bodies to assist in the Government's serious consideration of a proposal to bring anabolic steroids under the control of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971."

The statement went on to confirm that the Advisory Council had advised against control, but that the Government was pressing on because of the Council's concern "about the potential dangers to the health of athletes and others who take drugs of this type for non-medical purposes."

It would certainly set a legal precedent to control a drug under the Act solely because there were risks attached to using it. Earlier suggestions that steroids might be controlled in a similar way to tranquillisers (with supply illegal but possession not an offence) have evaporated. The Government now appears set on bringing the full range of Misuse of Drugs Act controls to bear on steroids.

If this happened Britain would be the first nation to make their possession a criminal offence. Stories in the press suggest that control is almost certain, particularly in the wake of the Ben Johnson revelations. The likelihood is that steroids would be a class C drug meaning up to two years in prison and an unlimited fine for those caught in possession.



Jeff Gutteridge, banned from competition for life for using steroids. Others in the future may also face up to two years in prison.

TONY DUFFY. ALLSPORT PHOTOGRAPHIC.