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Writing Workout

Penalty! 10 Yards on the Offense for Lack of Integrity!:

### Editorial on Cheating in Professional Sports Today

It's everywhere you look: flags waving on someone's doorstep, hats and jerseys of the people that walk by you, license plates and bumper stickers, even signs on your local convenience store. Sports. America is a land of pride, diversity, and culture, and a big part of that culture is the phenomenon of sports. Thousands of children play sports year-round in little league and Pop Warner. Fans flock to professional games by the thousands, and set TV ratings at their highest during playoff games. Baseball, Football, Basketball, Hockey- they all exemplify the American way: they're played with power, pride, and integrity. The athletes that so many of us look to as role models and heroes gain our love with their fierce play, passion, and skills. They're whom we admire, cheer for, and secretly wish to be.

For many, professional athletics is a place we invest our love and pride into. Lately, however, the extreme faith and love we put into our favorite players and teams has been corrupt. In the past couple of weeks, the sports section of the newspaper has been blotched with headlines of cheating in professional sports. Even those held close to our hearts here in Massachusetts, the hometown heroes of the New England Patriots and Boston Red Sox, have been revealed to hold scandalous secrets. Patriots head coach Bill Belichick was fined 750,000 dollars for taping and trying to steal other teams' signs. Star

safety Rodney Harrison, also of the Patriots, was suspended for a few games due to his consumption of illegal performance enhancing drugs. Though the New England fan base has been forgiving, these actions and others like it are starting to add up and negatively impact athletes and fans everywhere.

It's been said, "If you're not cheating, then you're not trying hard enough to win." In the highly competitive world of professional sports, though it is always tempting to cheat, cheating is by no means a show of passion, honor, strength, or drive in any way, Cheating can only be described as a desperate, misled act to gain an unfair edge over others. When athletes or coaches cheat, they taint their own possible successes as well as the possible successes of the team. Sportsmanship is about just, legal play and fairness. Cheating embarrasses the pureness and soul of sports. Foul play creates an uneven playing field and alters the results of the game being played. Not only does cheating disgrace professional sports, but it also poisons amateur sports. Issues of steroid use, stolen signs, and other forms of cheating are rapidly growing in non-professional leagues, and ruining the players.

Take John, age 17. He has all the tools to become a fantastic baseball player, but he still hasn't quite hit his growth spurt. As a senior in high school, it is his final year to be noticed by college scouts. In his highly competitive school, his smaller size prevents him from getting as much playing time as the other boys. As the season goes on, with so few innings on the field, his chances of being noticed by colleges is slim. Being a little taller and more muscular would really help him out. Looking to great players like Mark McGuire and Barry Bonds, John thinks, "If they used steroids to help them get better at baseball, why not me?" At the tender age of 17, John starts to depend on not only an

illegal performance-enhancing drug, but a drug that can screw up the development of his young body. Just like professional players he watches in the big leagues, John is on steroids.

High school, College, and amateur athletes of all kinds are starting to think more and more like John. If their role models and heroes, the Barry Bonds and Rodney Harrisons of society, set the example of cheating in sports, yearning athletes will follow. Not only does cheating in professional sports hurt the integrity of those leagues, but it also has harmful effects on amateur sports. Professional athletes set a horrible example to hopeful youngsters throughout America when they bend the rules.

Most Importantly, cheating dilutes the faith and love in sports.. Finding out your player was caught cheating is a devastating feeling. People feel as if their trust has been betrayed, and everything they believed in was false. Professional sports are an area of life many people have come to live and die with, to place all of their love, compassion and longing in, to trust. In the long run, cheating not only lets down the one who cheated, but also their team and all of their supporters. This facet of life known as sports encompasses the American values of honor, pride, and love. All these emotions, channeled into a player or a team or sport, makes for a passionate and meaningful competition. Cheating kills the values in sports.

Cheating is slowly chipping away at the heart of sports, a haven of American greatness. If cheating isn't contained and stopped, professional sports may lose some of their magnitude and luster. If the cheating continues, professional sports may lose their souls, all while leaving tainted records, ruined athletes, and devastated followers in their wake.