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# the Seahawk

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## Sport supplements: more harm than good?

SARAH BRODERS

STAFF WRITER

Athletes go to great lengths in the weight room to be the best at their individual sport. But many go to the same lengths in their medicine cabinets by taking performance-enhancing supplements, with most users not knowing specifics about the products they use.

UNCW associate professor Mike Perko has been researching this topic for the past 15 years. He recently finished a book on the subject called "Taking One for the Team: The New Thinking on Young Athletes and Dietary Supplements." He hopes it will inform the general public, especially young athletes, on the misconceptions and dangers of athletic performance-enhancing supplements.

"I was very interested in the behavior and what decisions athletes were making to buy these things," Dr. Perko said.

Perko began looking at the topic scientifically while in college. His idea for the book, along with most of the data, came from his doctoral dissertation. Sport supplements are now a \$12 billion per year industry, with young men taking a steady climb year after year.

"Since 1991, they've grown about 300 percent. I like to say it started as a cottage industry, and now it's the mansion on the hill," Perko said.

UNCW, like the majority of schools, has a widespread use of athletic supplements.

"I think that if you look across the board, they are very widely used," said Kevin Ankrum, head coach for men and women's track and field.

Since UNCW follows NCAA rules, athletic coaches are not allowed



Donnie Poon/The Seahawk

Experts say sport supplements may cause significant health risks.

to comment or suggest anything about supplements to any of their athletes.

"I won't say that they're good, but I don't think they're bad. Do they work? Sure they do. Do I use supplements myself? Sure. To me, I don't think they're that big of a deal. I think they do improve athletic performance," Ankrum said.

With supplements flooding the market, Perko wanted to educate young people about the drugs they use. A problem with the supplements is that the general public is under the impression that they are regulated to ensure the user's safety. "The simple truth is, there's no agency that tests these products," Perko said.

"Every year, hundreds of kids have some sort of episode where they have to go to the hospital because they took a product that they know very little about," Perko said. "So we have a situation where they are seen as

harmless by the general public because we can buy them at a grocery store, but there's also the misconception that they're thoroughly tested by someone in a lab coat with a Bunsen burner."

The Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act, passed by Congress in 1994, essentially takes power away from the FDA to pull these products off the shelves. Until enough people have died or have had a serious episode of stroke or another debilitating experience, the FDA cannot begin investigation on the supplement. The only regulation set upon dietary supplement companies is that they include an ingredients list on the package, and that they do not claim to cure, treat, or mitigate any disease.

Perko developed a survey to find out why so many young athletes take sports supplements. The survey was given to 6,000 student athletes around

the world to determine the external norms that were responsible for influencing these young athletes' decisions to take the supplements.

The survey indicated that parents, coaches, the media and professional athletes were the leading influences in deciding to use supplements.

He believes that the solution to this problem is to intervene with a good educational program before athletes begin supplement use.

Perko's survey has been used in two other doctoral dissertations, and several masters' theses, including one from Australia. In 1990, he testified at a senate hearing on the dangers of steroids and other health products for young kids. He also coached for 8 years, including an Olympic and World Cup soccer player.

"What we haven't done well enough is educating them on their decisions," Perko said.



Jacobus

## Student runs for NC House

TAYA OWENS

STAFF WRITER

If you choose to step into the voting booth November 5, you will see the name of a fellow student as a candidate for the NC House seat for the 19th District.

Ty Jacobus, UNCW senior, has decided to run for a chance to represent his community.

Jacobus is majoring in philosophy and minoring in economics. His reason for running is to "make a contribution." Jacobus represents the Libertarian party, and most of his goals and objectives adhere closely to the party's platform.

Jacobus said that he is a "strong advocate of objectivism." His focus is addressing the state budget and improving the education system. He firmly believes in the voucher system, claiming that the public school system

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