

Health

Right of privacy, need for data are in conflict

Elon undecided on drug testing of athletes

By Lisa Swim
Health Editor

When comedian Richard Pryor set himself on fire while freebasing cocaine a few years ago, a lot of people thought the incident was funny.

But nobody was laughing last June when cocaine overdoses killed Maryland basketball star Len Bias and Cleveland Browns football player Don Rogers.

In the years between Pryor's accident and the deaths of the two athletes, the cocaine-abuse problem in American society worsened. Celebrities such as actors and sports stars may or may not have a worse drug problem than the general public. It has become clear, however, that drastic measures to combat drug abuse are necessary.

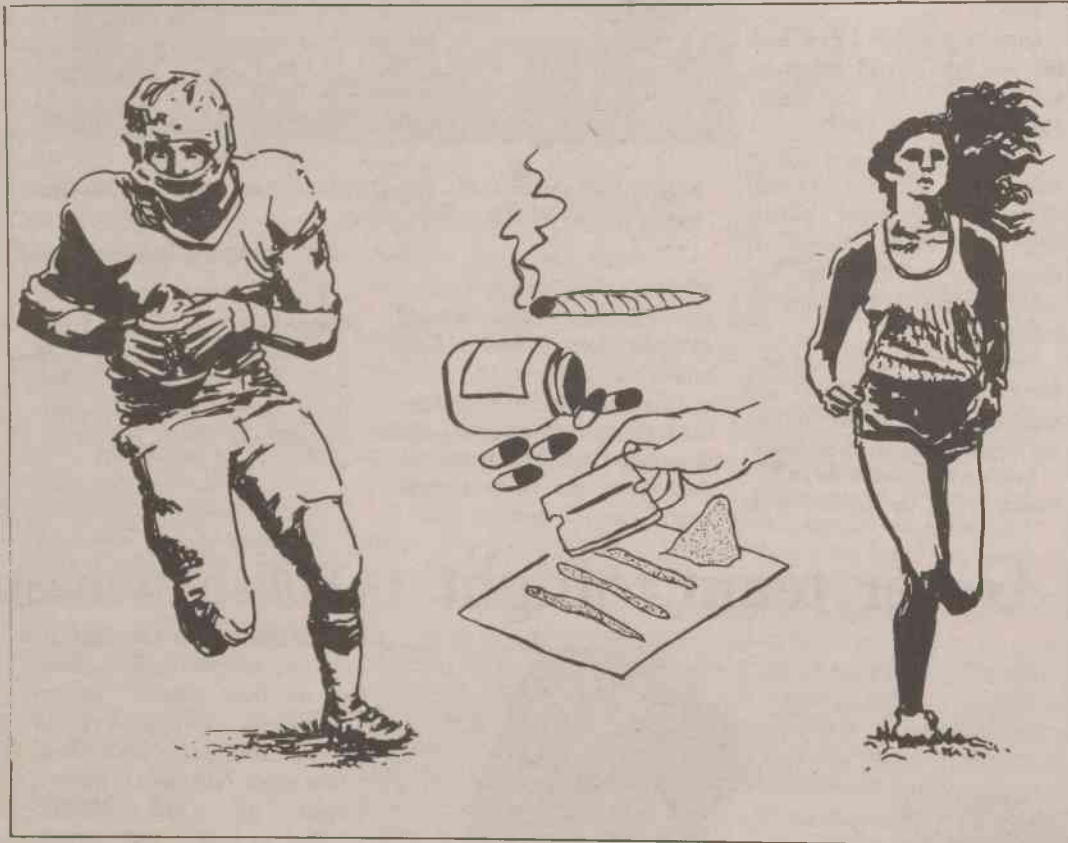
Some of the tougher measures are now being adopted by athletic departments at both large universities and small colleges. These measures, including voluntary and mandatory drug tests for athletes, are controversial, raising questions about the individual player's right to privacy and the school's right to demand drug-free performances from athletes whose education is subsidized by scholarships.

Among North Carolina schools, East Carolina University and Wake Forest University have mandatory drug testing, while N.C. State and UNC-Chapel Hill have voluntary drug testing.

At Elon College, athletic officials are still debating whether to test athletes for drugs. But if the decision to do so is made, the tests will be mandatory, according to Dr. Alan White, athletic director.

The Issues

Is drug testing an invasion of privacy? Or, as Irwin Smallwood recently wrote in *The Greensboro News and Record*, "Is drug testing to protect the public integrity of the business making athletes rich and famous?"



Alongside these two contrasting points of views is the argument that athletes are being singled out as drug-testing targets.

In a recent interview, Elon athletic director White asked, "If the college is going to start testing athletes (for drugs), why not test the fraternities? Why not test *The Pendulum* staff?"

In fact, other sectors in society are considering or have already begun mandatory drugs testing of employees. For example, in his recent speech on drugs, President Reagan announced that mandatory tests on federal employees, chosen at random, would soon begin.

On Sept. 18, a federal judge in New Jersey ruled that mandatory urine testing of police and firefighters in Plainfield, N.J., was an unconstitutional invasion of privacy. The Supreme Court of the United States will probably be the final arbiter of the invasion-of-privacy issue. Meanwhile, the public seems to be clamoring for

those in authority to do *something* about the drug problem.

The extent of drug use among college athletes has been studied by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Last June 30 the NCAA reported that on a study which claimed that in the past five years 20 to 25 percent of college athletes had used marijuana or cocaine on an average of once a week.

In light of such reports, some athletic administrators who once opposed drug testing are having second thoughts. Among them is Elon's AD White, who told the *News and Record* last June that "I started coming around to believe that, if we're going to do anything constructive, we have to have information, and the only way to gather that information is through testing."

How Testing Works

Suppose for a moment Elon began drug testing.

What tests would be used and how much money would it take to get the program off the ground properly?

Dr. Barry Beedle, assistant professor of physical education and an expert on sports medicine, said, "Drug testing is a less than perfect science."

He added, "In order for the testing to be fair and as accurate as possible, two tests must be given and proved positive."

These tests are the "screen test" and the "conformation tests." The screen test is a urinalysis, which detects eight basic substances in the urine.

The conformation test takes these basic substances and narrows them down to a more specific list of possible drugs in the urine sample.

For Elon to do drug testing in this fashion--which both Beedle and White said they would prefer to do--a considerable amount of money would be needed.

The combined cost of the screen and conformation tests would be about \$80 per athlete.

In addition, White said, "Elon would have to consider if it has the counseling apparatus" to deal with athletes identified as having drug problems. If it does not, he said, Elon would have to hire "specialized persons."

He added, "This also does not include the educational materials needed to increase the general awareness of drugs." He suggested that a class devoted to problems arising from drug abuse might be effective.

Help, Not Punish

Beedle and White agreed that any drug testing program should help persons with drug problems, not merely punish athletes by taking away their scholarships.

Elon is a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA). The NAIA and the NCAA differ somewhat on penalties or sanctions for athletes identified as drug abusers.

Beedle said, "The NCAA is only in post-season championship competition. Testing is voluntary, but if you do not submit, you cannot play."

In that sense, he said, the NCAA's program is not really "voluntary."

Beedle added that at universities with "big-time" athletic programs, such as Florida State and the University of Miami, the results of drug testing remain within the athletic department. He said he approved of the confidentiality and recommendation it for Elon if drug testing began here.

If Elon were to begin drug testing, Roche Biomedical Laboratories "is right down the road and set up for testing," White pointed out.

He said Roche is one of the laboratories in the country which can perform the most accurate drug tests--the screen and conformation.

White said that peer pressure to use drugs is the same for athletes and non-athletes in college. He said, "The one advantage of mandatory drug testing would be that it would give athletes a socially acceptable reason to say 'no'."