

## REVIEW OF

Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits, and How Baseball Got Big, by Jose Canseco. 2005, Regan Books/Harper Collins

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"This book does not intend to condone or encourage the use of any particular drugs, medicine, or illegal substances ..!"

This disclaimer after the title page begins the book Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits, and How Baseball Got Big, by Jose Canseco. Many infomercials on television begin in a similar fashion. And to be honest, that is what Canseco's book is--an infomercial for steroids.

"Carefully controlling the amounts of steroids you take, administering them at the proper time--that's the way to make them work for you, without risking your health." The book is full of stuff like that. Indeed, Canseco comes across not as a retired baseball player but as a steroid salesman. He excuses away Lyle Alzado's brain cancer death (which Alzado himself attributed to steroids) and explains most every side effect of steroids to using the wrong ones in the wrong proportions at the wrong time. "The performance enhancement that can come with responsible steroid use is nothing to be dismissed. It's an opportunity, not a danger. And those who are trying to make an issue of it are speaking from ignorance."

The press has presented this book as a scandalous "tell all", but to be honest it falls well short in this regard. Yes, Canseco names several names and makes claims about how rampant steroid use is (and takes personal responsibility for all of it), but he cannot be scandalous about it.

Because he is not ashamed of it. He is proud of it. Canseco calls himself "The Chemist" on the dustcover of the book, and he makes it clear it is his personal mission to get steroids to be a fixture in the game of baseball. Note that I said "is", not "was". Canseco considers steroids the greatest thing that happened to sports and to him, and repeatedly states that baseball would not have survived the 1994 strike if he had not personally gotten several of baseball's stars, and indeed team trainers, to use and administer steroids.

To Canseco, the many side effects of steroid use are nonexistent because he knows when and how to use them. If you use them correctly (under his supervision), you will have no side effects. If you use them incorrectly (and virtually everyone else does, in his mind), you will have problems, from Jason Giambi's bloated appearance (he titles a

chapter "Giambi, the Most Obvious Juicer in the Game") to Tony Saunders' arm breaking mid-pitch in a game in 1999, ending his career.

So, does Canseco have problems? Two failed marriages, domestic violence arrests, probation violations, bar fights . . . In other words, no. Any side effects? A career derailed by numerous injuries--three back surgeries and a tendon transplant? No, his career was prolonged because steroids helped him recover from injuries, plus there were other times late in his career when he was put on the DL when he wasn't injured.

You see, Canseco brought steroids into baseball. He saved baseball, and the owners were grateful. The power numbers increased, and along with them the salaries, and so owners were no longer grateful. They needed to punish him. They signed him to contracts not to play him, but to bench him or put him on the DL. See, today he is 40 years old, and he can still play as good as or better than when he was younger. That .172 season at AAA Charlotte in 2002 that caused him to retire--he does not mention that . . .

Canseco does not mention a lot of things, and the things he does mention are very slanted. This is not a memoir, it is an infomercial, and he is selling himself and his steroids. If he paints one picture badly, he loses credibility with the other.

All those wild things you may remember about Canseco? They didn't happen the way the racist establishment pointed them out to be. Oh, did I mention the racism? Canseco is Cuban. Before him there were no Cuban players since Luis Tiant and Tony Perez. If the same things that happened to him had happened to Cal Ripken, nobody would have noticed, but baseball and the media needed to destroy the Cuban. That is very clear. (Actually, the only thing that is very clear is that Canseco despises Cal Ripken--he refers to Ripken constantly).

The truth about Canseco, in his description: His father brings the family from Cuba to Miami, where he and his brother are forced to play baseball though neither are any good. He doesn't make the varsity team until his senior year, but is somehow drafted and shipped off to Idaho for minor league baseball, where he is shunned as a Cuban. He drinks hard liquor for the first time, nearly dies from alcohol poisoning, and more or less leaves it alone for good--his first and last party. His mother dies, and he promises to her comatose body that he will become the best athlete possible. He is introduced to steroids by a friend, and his promise to his mother is his moral imperative to take them.

Despite not being very good, he is invited to Spring Training where he complains about being tagged too hard by the white, 1st round pick, top prospect first baseman (Rob Nelson) and the racist coaches punish him so roughly he nearly walks off the team (never mind that they may have been reacting to him for whining, not for being Cuban). He gets sent back to the minors, has a monster season, becomes the major league Rookie of the Year the next year, then meets Mark McGwire the following year.

At 6'5", 220 pounds, McGwire as a rookie in 1987 has "hardly any muscle on him", and shatters the rookie home run record only because of his natural talent. The next

year Canseco introduces him to steroids and they shoot up in the locker room together (the fact that McGwire went into a three-year slump from 1989 to 1991 is not addressed). "The media dubbed us the Bash Brothers, but we were really the 'Roids Boys.'" This prepares McGwire for the home run record he would break seven years later.

Canseco has the 40-homer, 40-stolen base year in 1988 and his life takes off. Or does it? The title references "Wild Times," but Canseco goes through great pains to prove he is not wild. See, he was friends with Madonna, but it was all innocent--they never had sex. He was caught with a loaded gun in his car and was speeding several times and once collided with his wife's car after they had been arguing through open windows at a high rate of speed. If these things happened to a white player (like Cal Ripken), nobody would have noticed. Albert Belle was castigated for throwing a baseball at a reporter. "Just ask yourself how the media would have reacted if Ripken or McGwire had done such a thing. They would have called it a joke: Ha-ha, funny-funny, that 'ol boy sure does like to clown around."

See, nobody accused McGwire of using steroids--nothing he could do was ever wrong. Tom Boswell wrote a scathing article in 1988 accusing Canseco of steroid use. "I wanted to sue Boswell, but in the end, it just didn't seem worth my time." (He never considers that the reason he didn't sue may have been related to the fact that the accusations were true). Canseco even claims that McGwire never used androstendione, that he planted the bottle in his locker intentionally so that the reporters would see it and assume he is using it instead of steroids. "McGwire using andro would have been like a hospital patient on morphine asking for an aspirin. It just doesn't make any sense."

No, what doesn't make any sense is how Canseco does not see the obvious. He is so busy trying to campaign for all baseball players to use steroids, for Major League Baseball to embrace them, that he turns a blind eye to the effects they may have had on his life. He says he would not have made the major leagues without them, that he wasn't good enough "to play beer league softball", yet he was drafted and advanced quickly through the minor leagues without them. He denies having any "Roid Rage" problems, or even that steroids cause them, yet he has legal problems related to violence. He states that they have not caused any injuries and have helped him recover to the point that he would be in a wheelchair if not for steroids, yet his career was destroyed by injuries. Oh, and while he says he would be in a wheelchair if not for steroids, he was not using steroids when he tested positive for them and spent time in jail for violating his probation--someone switched the samples and he has a lawsuit pending against the lab.

What bothers me most about this book is the total lack of accountability. This is a very readable book--well written, fast-moving, hard to put down. High school and college athletes will enjoy this book, and in doing so, will be sold a lot of false information on steroids. Not only will they be told steroids are harmless, they will be encouraged to use them and instructed on how to use them.

As a drug preventionist with a Master's in Addiction Psychology and a former high school sports coach, this book greatly disturbs me. Many athletes have died from

steroid use, and many more have had legal problems stemming from assaults and rapes that may have been caused by steroid use. Many athletes have suffered injuries directly attributable to steroids (joint and tendon injuries in over-developed athletes are common, as steroids strengthen muscles, but not tendons or bones). Lyle Alzado considered steroid use the cause of his fatal brain cancer, and Jason Giambi did miss much of last year with a benign tumor.

Again, Canseco acknowledges that some baseball players have had problems because he was not supervising their use. Since the average reader cannot have his supervision either (and since he does not acknowledge his own numerous problems or have any medical training whatsoever, who's to say what value his supervision would have), hopefully the average reader will take his advice with a grain of salt and enjoy the book as a tabloid memoir that promises to spill the dirt on some of our favorite players.