Increased interest in steroids and other banned drugs has had an impact on society recently. Athletes might want to use these times as a lesson to think twice when trying out new performance-enhancers in their training regimens.

The line that is drawn between legal and illegal drugs in sports depends on the governing organization. In the case of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the banned list is extensive and the consequences are severe. According to Matt Mitten, professor of law at Marquette University and chairman of the NCAA Committee on Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects, the current rules in the NCAA specify that a first-time offender of the drug policy receives a one-year suspension and loss of a year of eligibility.

"Athletes are responsible for what they put voluntarily into their system," said Mitten. "What athletes are told to do is to check with a member of their school's sports medicine staff beforehand they take anything." Rider's Head Athletic Trainer Tim Lengle recognizes the responsibility that he and his sports medicine staff possess.

"We say to the athletes every year at ARETE [athletic orientation] that you need to know what you are taking," said Lengle. "If you are taking some type of supplement, you have to take it to us because we have to check it for banned substances." The NCAA's list for banned substances in the 2004-2005 athletic seasons is quite extensive. The list is divided up in six categorized drug groups: stimulants (i.e. ephedrine, cocaine); anabolic agents (i.e. anabolic steroids, androstenediol); substances banned for specific sports; diuretics (i.e. benzthiazide, ethacrynic acid); street drugs (i.e. heroin, marijuana); and peptide hormones and analogues (i.e. growth hormone, corticotrophin). The list has tightened in recent years, as substances such as ephedrine were legal until recently.

"Ephedrine was the one [used] up until last year and is now illegal," said Lengle. "Many athletes abused that because no one ever really got across the dangers of ephedrine."

Even though the NCAA has progressively stiffened restrictions on the banned substance list, there are still many performance-enhancements available that can be purchased over-the-counter. To clarify the term "performance-enhancement drug," Mitten defines them as "certain drugs that enhance performance even by making you bigger, stronger, faster or increasing your metabolism."

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There are many performance-enhancers and supplements that can be purchased over-the-counter in pharmacies and nutrition outlets, perfectly legal to students, but not to athletes. College athletes must analyze ingredients with a professional beforehand to ensure compliance with the NCAA's drug policy.