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Taking anti-steroid message to kids

Bereft parent says they know too little

By Milton Kent

Sun Reporter

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It usually takes three questions into his chats with youngsters about the dangers of using steroids for Don Hooton to find out how little they know.

Hooton says that after he asks youths their ages and where they're from, he asks whether any adult - parent, teacher or coach - has talked seriously to them about the dangers of the substance that he believes caused his son, Taylor, to commit suicide five years ago at the age of 17.

"Rarely do 10 percent of the hands go up," Hooton said yesterday during a Promoting a Lifetime of Activity for Youth (PLAY) event at Oriole Park that was organized by Richie Bancells, the Orioles' head athletic trainer, and attended by pitcher Jeremy Guthrie.

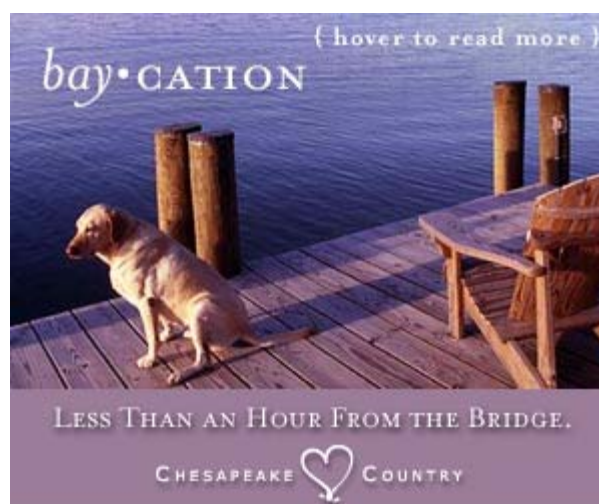
Hooton, who tours the country talking to kids about the long-term effects of anabolic steroids as president and founder of the Taylor Hooton Foundation, said his audiences know generally about the positives of performance-enhancing drugs but not about what can happen to steroid users down the line.

"They [the youngsters] say, 'It's a drug. It makes you better. It makes you stronger.' It's all the positive attributes that go along with steroids," Hooton said. "They have a concept of what steroids are; it's all positive, but no concept of what the risks or dangers are because nobody's talking to them. That's what our job is, and we're trying to change that."

Hooton and other members of the foundation intend to visit all 30 major league parks this season to chat with kids in settings like that of yesterday's event, sponsored by the Professional Baseball Athletic Trainers Society.

Though yesterday's audience - members of the Orioles Dugout Club age 13 and younger - might have been a tad young for an intense anti-steroid message, Hooton said some conversation between youths and adults should take place when the kids are young, because the median age for first use of steroids is 15.

"We should probably be talking to them around 12 or 13," Hooton said. "We ought be talking to these



kids about what it means to take artificial testosterone and start injecting it. Parents like us ... we just didn't have a clue as to what the stuff was."

Charles Stream, who made the trip from Willow Street, Pa., with his two sons, Ryan, 9, and Brandon, 13, said he has already had a steroids chat with his boys, who have seen one of their heroes, former Orioles first baseman Rafael Palmeiro, test positive for steroid use.

"They really are disappointed," Stream said. "When they hear about a player that has used it, that really disappoints them. You are out there to play yourself, not something helping you play the game. And then knowing the health side effects, that disappoints them too."

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