

The Needle and the Damage done

Drugs are potentially threatening the beautiful game, says **Richard Marcus**.

attention to detail allows them to reliably track player movements on all tables, most importantly when new players come into any game. They feel the ability to track the movements of more than 50 simultaneous players, with perhaps the capacity for even more as they experience growing confidence in their "poker's little helpers."

"Drugs capable of altering the landscape of thought and alertness may threaten poker in the very near future"

What about bricks n' mortar cardrooms? Well, just like online, live poker is about gaining and exploiting edges against your opponents. Usually study, observation, analysis, and experience together with the ability to mentally sustain these applications are what achieve these advantages. But Modafinil is the first artificial stimulant I've heard about that alters this landscape by giving a player the ability to perform longer mentally and at a more concentrated level than what he can achieve normally. It not only helps in gathering knowledge with a sharp, observational outlook, but also in applying intellect without normal taxation. If a player already has analytical skills, the drug can help him to contain the emotional destructiveness of tilting, as he can focus beyond the immediate result and concentrate on the overall plan, essentially wiping out an inherent weakness of many good players.

You know, I hesitated before writing on this subject. Do I really want to open up a can of worms, such as the one opened in the US by George Mitchell in naming baseball star Roger Clemens as a massive long-time steroid user? In fact, do I have any knowledge of specific poker players taking Modafinil or Adderall? Is there a "Marcus Report" that names names like Mitchell's report did with baseball's steroid-takers?

Sorry, but no. I haven't even heard of a single player who has taken any drug to enhance his poker skills. But the problem is that I've heard several players talking about it on different occasions. This is why I am writing about it now. I think Modafinil, Adderall and other drugs capable of altering the landscape of thought and alertness may threaten poker in the very near future. Especially in light of the megabucks surrounding the pro circuits, let alone the driven desires to succeed in competition and be champions at all the major events.

So let's stop talking about drug-induced breakthroughs for mental competition. As baseball once went through a time period where players talked about steroids before actually taking them, poker might be in a similar phase right now for mental-performance enhancers, and that is why any of you out there who might be influenced to take drugs to better your poker play need to re-think this. It is not worth it, and with all the regular forms of cheating we see both online and in bricks n' mortar cardrooms, this kind of very dangerous cheating is the last thing we need. Besides, taking any performance enhancing drugs will ultimately hurt you. **E**



Richard Marcus: No illegal substances were taken in the making of this article

Well, steroids have invaded just about every sport under the sun, and now that poker has become a 'sport', has steroids' evil era of cheating tarnished the professional world of poker too?

This is a touchy question but it's not at all impossible. When speaking of "poker steroids," I'm not referring to the anabolic type but rather those drugs that increase mental stamina and the ability to stave off sleep and headaches.

As much as we might not like to admit this, drugs such as Modafinil and Adderall may be out there in the poker world. Modafinil keeps you awake and enhances short-term memory. It has legitimate medical uses and has also been used by the military to increase the performance of its pilots and soldiers in combat situations. Adderall is a pharmaceutical psychostimulant comprising mixed amphetamine salts. It is used primarily to treat attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and narcolepsy (excessive daytime sleepiness).

I was first made aware of poker players using these drugs by way of a disturbing e-mail I received from a mother whose online playing teenager she suspected of "poker doping." She wrote that her son was staying

up all hours of the night playing online, missing sleep, missing school, missing out on just about everything. Did I know how he could be doing this, she asked.

Well, one thing I knew even without knowing was why these kinds of drugs appeal to sleepless online poker players who want to be just as sharp while playing as they are sleepless. Online players often play multiple games at once and need to retain more data and play more hands in much less time than when playing a single game. This requires a keen alertness unadulterated by sleepiness. For example, if one normally plays a max mum of 3 tables simultaneously and wants to increase that without losing the ability to keep track of all the variables, he may search for the added "fuel" needed to make this jump upwards possible. Short-handed games alter this tracking effect even more, as players tend to devote more focus on the short game than the filled tables. Everyone is different of course, but for most players the natural comfort level where they don't feel like they're giving up anything due to distractions is 3 tables, or 27 simultaneous opponents.

But with Modafinil and Adderall, players are able to extend their effective gamesmanship to 6 tables with relative ease. Their new altered ability to increase

