# Top baseball player Alex Rodriguez suspended through 2014 season

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Alex Rodriguez, one of baseball's top players, was suspended on Monday by Major League Baseball (MLB) through the 2014 season for his use of performance-enhancing drugs. His suspension, along with those of more than a dozen other players, reveals the corrupt character of the professional sports industry.

MLB just issued 50 game suspensions to 12 other players for their use of performance-enhancing drugs, including three who played in the 2013 all-stars game—San Diego shortstop Everth Cabrera, Texas outfielder Nelson Cruz and Detroit shortstop Jhonny Peralta.

These suspensions follow the sixty-five-game suspension of Ryan Braun of the Milwaukee Brewers, which was announced on July 22. Braun was the 2011 National League Most Valuable Player (MVP).

Rodriguez is appealing his suspension and is eligible to play while his appeal is pending. He has not, however, played so far this season because of a hip injury. In the last two weeks he had indicated he was once again fit to play and had begun a minor league rehabilitation assignment. The Yankees have been reluctant to activate him pending MLB's expected suspension.

If the suspension is upheld Rodriguez will lose approximately 34 million dollars. The Yankees will still owe him over $60 million for 2015-2017, but this may be contested.

All of these players had been targeted by MLB following reports by the *Miami New Times* in January of this year that they had been connected with Biogenesis of America, a now-closed "anti-aging" clinic.

Porter Fisher, a disgruntled ex-employee of Biogenesis, had provided Biogenesis records to the *Miami New Times* that described "the firm's real business: selling performance-enhancing drugs." Among its customers were about 20 MLB players.

Alex Rodriguez began his major league career in 1994 at the age of 18, becoming the third 18-year-old to do so since 1900. In his 19-year career he has played for the Seattle Mariners (1994-2000), the Texas Rangers (2001-2003), and the New York Yankees (2004-present).

During his career he has been a 12-time All-Star and a three-time American League MVP. In all of baseball history, Rodriguez has had more seasons with a 100 or more RBIs (runs batted in) than any other player. Having hit 647 home runs over the course of his career, he ranks fifth of all time in this category.

In 2000 he signed with the Texas Rangers for what at the time was the richest contract in sports history—a 10-year agreement worth $252 million.

Despite Rodriguez's great personal success with the Rangers, they came in last place in each of his seasons with the team, in large part because his huge contract prevented the Rangers from having enough money to sign other talented players.

Consequently after the 2003 season he was traded to the New York Yankees, a team with the highest payroll, which could afford to take on the remainder of Rodriguez's contract and still have money to pay other talented players.

As a Yankee, Rodriguez was named the American League's MVP in both 2005 and 2007, after which he signed a new 10-year $275 million contract that included multimillion-dollar incentives for breaking various records.

In 2009 *Sports Illustrated* reported that Rodriguez, along with over 100 other players, had tested positive for anabolic steroids in 2003. At that time, the players had agreed to be tested with the promise of anonymity,

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as part of a “survey” that was conducted by Major League Baseball to determine whether a mandatory drug testing program might be necessary. At the time there was no penalty or punishment for a positive test.

Shortly after the publication of this article, Rodriguez admitted he had used banned substances from 2001 to 2003. He indicated he had been under “an enormous amount of pressure to perform.” He added, “Back then, [baseball] was a different culture... It was very loose. I was young, I was stupid, I was naïve. And I wanted to prove to everyone that I was worth being one of the greatest players of all time.”

It had been an open secret for many years that players in MLB were using steroids and similar performing-enhancing drugs. Their use had been either tacitly or directly encouraged, particularly as the commercialization of baseball was becoming a dominant feature of the game. This became particularly apparent in the aftermath of the 1994 strike. This 232-day strike was the longest in baseball history, culminating in the only time the World Series was ever cancelled.

Baseball’s tacit promotion of the use of steroids to inflate the number of home runs was used as a way of attracting fans back into the ballparks following the aftermath of this bitter strike. In the thirty-year period prior to the strike only three players had hit 50 or more home runs in a season. After the strike players hitting 50 or more home runs became commonplace.

In 1997 Mark McGwire hit 58 home runs and Ken Griffey Jr. hit 56, both having come close to Roger Maris’s record of 61 set in 1961. In 1998, MLB promoted the season as one in which there was a very real possibility that McGwire or some other player would break Roger Maris’s home run record.

Ultimately that season McGwire would hit an astounding 70 home runs, followed by Sammy Sosa of the Chicago Cubs who hit 66. As the season progressed, this unprecedented home-run explosion became a major news story, drawing sellout crowds, a massive TV audience and record revenues for baseball.

McGwire’s record was broken three years later in 2001, when Barry Bonds hit 73 home runs.

Later all three players either admitted to using performance-enhancing drugs or overwhelming evidence was presented which showed that they had done so.

In 2002 Ken Caminiti revealed that he won the 1996 National League MVP award while on steroids. In 2003 pitcher David Wells claimed that “25 to 40 percent of all Major Leaguers are juiced.” In 2005, former All-Star Jose Canseco published his tell-all book “Juiced,” in which he claimed that as many as 80 percent of players used steroids and that he had done so for his entire career.

In response to these public exposures, MLB began to attack the same players whom they had encouraged to use these drugs. Soon Congress began an investigation of steroid use in baseball, targeting and subpoenaing several prominent figures in the sport, including McGwire and Canseco.

Explaining why he took steroids, Canseco stated, “The answer is simple. Because myself and others had no choice if we wanted to continue playing. Because MLB did nothing to take it out of the sport....”

“Baseball owners and the players union have been very much aware of the undeniable fact that as a nation we will do anything to win. They turned a blind eye to the clear evidence of steroid use in baseball. Why? Because it sold tickets and resurrected a game that had recently suffered a black eye from a player strike [in 1994]. The result was an intentional act by baseball to promote, condone and encourage the players to do whatever they had to do to win games, bring back the fans, and answer the bottom line. Salaries went up, revenue increased and owners got richer. But this comes with a cost.”

For professional athletes today, a very fine line separates stardom and great wealth from failure. Enormous amounts of money are promised to the athletes who perform exceptionally well. Those who fail to do so are often quickly discarded, oftentimes left with disabling and crippling injuries.

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