

Jeff Novitzky

Committee on Energy and Commerce

Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade Hearing

Testimony

My name is Jeff Novitzky and I am the UFC's Vice President of Athlete Health and Performance. I would like to thank the committee for having this hearing, as it is important to recognize the significance we all place on athlete health and safety.

I would like to start off by giving the committee a brief history of my experience outside of the UFC and what ultimately led me to the organization last year.

In April of 2015, I retired from a 22 plus year career in federal law enforcement, the first 15 years as a Special Agent with the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation Division, and the last 7 years as a special agent with the United States Food and Drug Administration, Office of Criminal Investigation. In 2002, I opened an investigation on a company known as BALCO Laboratories, for the illegal distribution of athletic performance enhancing drugs and the money laundering of the profits thereof. While the case and subsequent cases that I worked in this arena focused on the illegal distribution of performance enhancing drugs and not the athletes who used them, nevertheless the BALCO Laboratories investigation ended up involving some of the biggest names in sports in the world at the time who were athlete clients of BALCO. Barry Bonds, Marion Jones, dozens of Olympic athletes, boxers, NFL athletes and several Major League Baseball athletes. The high profile nature of the investigation steered many investigative leads my way over the remaining course of my career, and led me to subsequent investigations involving the distribution of PED's to high profile athletes. I spearheaded an investigation of Kirk Radomski, a former NY Mets clubhouse attendant who distributed PED's to dozens of Major League Baseball players. I worked extensively with Senator George Mitchell in assisting him with the Mitchell Report, his report of PED use in Major League Baseball. And finally, I conducted an investigation involving professional cycling, including the United States Postal Service Professional Cycling Team, whose members included Lance Armstrong, Floyd Landis and Tyler Hamilton. I have seen doping in virtually all levels of competition—high school, college, professional, and the Olympics. While I learned a tremendous amount about the drugs being used, their athletic benefits, their health side effects and anti-doping strategies, in my opinion the most valuable area of information that I was exposed to was the many conversations I had with the athletes who chose to use PED's. I estimate that throughout my investigations, I spoke with between 150 and 200 athletes who chose to use PED's. I always took the opportunity to ask them why they made the choice. More often than not, the answer came down to one word. "Trust." They didn't trust that their teammates, who they were competing for playing time and contracts weren't using, they didn't trust that their competitors weren't using, and most importantly, they didn't trust that their sports organizations really cared about the issue, and that doping was allowed to fester because there were not sufficient programs in place to catch, as well as deter, athletes from ultimately harming themselves and others.

When I was first approached by UFC to develop and implement their new anti-doping program, I saw this as an opportunity to change that tide and sentiment. The more I talked with UFC executives, I quickly realized their passion and commitment to athlete health and safety was paramount. They told me repeatedly, "We want the best anti-doping program in the world. We want to be the gold standard for not just combat sports, but for all sports." I realized that I could be part of a program within a sports organization that its athletes could trust, and could be a positive influence towards athlete health and safety for not just the UFC, but for all professional sports.

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Based on my many years of exposure to anti-doping programs within professional sports, I can confidently state that in the year and a half since our anti-doping program has been up and running, the UFC has put together the most comprehensive and robust anti-doping program in professional sports, in the world. A major pillar of our program is our outsourcing of the administration of the program to the United States Anti-Doping Agency (or USADA), who is widely considered the most reputable anti-doping organization in the world. USADA is recognized as the official anti-doping agency for Olympic, Pan American and Paralympic sport in the United States. The recognition was included in the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act, 2002, and became public law when President George W. Bush signed the act. In addition to USADA, a completely independent authority from UFC, carrying our anti-doping program, we work extensively with USADA to educate our athletes about the dangers of doping. They are learning that if they choose to use PED's, they are not only risking harm to themselves, but they are also risking the health of the individuals they are competing against.

Part of the education process includes holding athlete and coaches summits, where we bring in several dozen of our athletes and coaches a few times a year and provide them with education and training seminars on various relevant health and safety issues. These summits give UFC and its athletes and their coaches the chance to open a dialogue. Earlier this year, we held one such summit which included a world renowned expert on dehydration and rehydration issues, something our fighters routinely experience during weight management practices. Our goal is to make them more informed, and thus practice safer weight management to mitigate any health consequences and the help maximize their performance. To that point, the UFC has disseminated weight management guidelines to its fighters, providing a blueprint for determining a fighter's appropriate weight class and a roadmap to reaching those weight categories in a safe manner.

Earlier this year, the UFC made a 5-year, \$1 million commitment to the Professional Fighters Brain Health Study that is being conducted through the Cleveland Clinic. This commitment makes UFC the largest combat sports contributor to the study. The study aims to follow combat sports participants over longer periods of time and develop ways to improve safety in combat sports, along with other professional athletes exposed to repetitive head trauma.

Another big development relating to fighter health and safety is the UFC's a new corporate headquarters, scheduled to be completed and opened in the Spring of 2017. This new campus will not only accommodate our corporate employees, but it will house the new UFC Athlete Health and Performance Center. The two-story, 30,000 square foot facility will contain an Octagon, a boxing ring, mat space, an indoor sprint track, Olympic lifting platforms and a media center. There are also consultation and treatment rooms, a physiotherapy and rehabilitation gym, as well as performance technology, nutrition and sports science areas. The goal of this state of the art facility will be to provide all of our athletes with the best training, rehabilitation, nutrition education and injury prevention practices available in the world. We will team with Universities to conduct studies on our athletes to learn best practices as it comes to their training, rehabilitation, brain health, nutrition and weight management practices. We will use these studies to not only help UFC athletes, but all professional athletes. It has always been a priority for the UFC to ensure that our athletes are properly prepared when they step into competition, and the Athlete Health and Performance Center fulfills that promise.

As you can see, the UFC has taken concrete steps towards increasing safety standards and protocols not just within the organization, not just throughout mixed martial arts and the combat sports community,

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but across the board in the professional sports landscape. From our anti-doping program—which has been recognized by media as “the best anti-doping program in professional sports”, our continuing education of athletes on topics relating to their health and safety, safer weight management guidelines and practices, our participation in brain studies through the Cleveland Clinic, and our new Athlete Health and Performance Center, we have made great strides to ensure all of our athletes compete at a level playing field, take proactive steps to protect their health and safety, and enable them to lead fulfilling lives both in and out of competition. As an organization, we are not only looking to lead combat sports in these areas, but to take a leadership role and set an example for all of professional sport.