

5-26-2008 Breeding Athletes

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2 JOSH CENTOR: Welcome to an interesting conversation
3 with "Mondays With Myles". Today we are going to talk about
4 the Kentucky Derby, which happened a few weeks ago.

5 Dr. Brand, a filly by the name of Eight Belles
6 finished second, broke both her ankles in the gallop past the
7 finish and had to be put down at Churchill Downs right after
8 the race. So I want your thoughts on this topic.

9 DR. MYLES BRAND: Well, I watched a race in which Big
10 Brown ran a great race, and then the horse that came in
11 second, a filly, broke both ankles and had to be euthanized
12 immediately afterwards. And I've been reading about what
13 happened. It was a very, very sad occasion. Josh, you may
14 not know this, but I'm a horse lover. I mean, I really like
15 those animals. They are very special animals.

16 And I was wondering what happened here? Why did this
17 go wrong? And, of course, it isn't the first horse that had
18 to be euthanized from racing. A lot more have to, as well, in
19 thoroughbred racing. And I heard all kinds of explanations
20 that something was wrong with the track. It should be
21 synthetic rather than dirt.

22 But the explanation that stuck with me, that seemed
23 most reasonable, was that we have so bred thoroughbred horses
24 that their bone structure can't carry that muscular large
25 animal. And we race them earlier. We start racing them --

1 training them when they are 18 months. And they are racing
2 three-year-olds, two-year-olds, sometimes four-year-olds is a
3 old racehorse in thoroughbred racing.

4 And so we race them very young. But more importantly
5 we bred them to such a high peak in order for performance that
6 it creates breakdowns.

7 So here's the question I want to ask. This concerns
8 performance-enhancing drugs for humans. That is going in new
9 directions beyond steroids. And we are hearing conversation
10 about molecular manipulation, genetic molecular manipulation,
11 in which athletes now, who manipulate their genes, maybe from
12 birth, so they'll be better athletes.

13 Is there not a message here? We start breeding
14 athletes. Don't we get into the same series of problems we
15 get into with the way that we bred thoroughbreds, that we are
16 going to create inadvertently harmful physical effects.

17 Now, it is bad enough that we do it with horses, and
18 it is very uncomfortable, and perhaps immoral. But certainly
19 it should be immoral if we had something similar happen to
20 human beings.

21 JOSH CENTOR: That is very interesting question. And
22 I want to bring NCAA vice president and senior advisor to the
23 president, Wally Renfro, into the conversation because, Wally,
24 you've been with the NCAA almost as long as anybody on the
25 planet, if not longer. And this is a conversation I can't

1 imagine that we would necessarily have had in the 1970s
2 talking about performance-enhancing drugs and genetic
3 manipulation of student-athletes.

4 WALLY RENFRO: Well, not directly. You're right. We
5 probably didn't have those conversations specifically about
6 athletes, although the discussion about gene manipulation,
7 cloning of, you know, biological beings -- animals or
8 whatever -- and then the extension of that possibility to
9 human beings or to human organs was starting certainly in the
10 late 1970s.

11 And I can remember at the time, when I first started
12 hearing those discussions, you know, I was -- you know, I was
13 sort of puzzled by the moral questions that, you know, arose.
14 What are the moral implications of being able to manipulate
15 human genes in ways that you improve, you know, what you
16 probably can start out with from scratch?

17 DR. MYLES BRAND: Now, you know, we have to be very
18 careful how we address this. I can imagine where there is
19 some genetic disease passed down in families which we actually
20 do want to change the gene structure to protect people from
21 those genes. And that would be good. And that would be a
22 medical advance.

23 But if we start to use genetic manipulation to create
24 better athletes so that they'll run faster, jump higher, lift
25 more, we are going to run into, I'm guessing, some of the same

1 problems that we were running into in the way we genetically
2 manipulate the genes for animals. And so we'll get some of
3 the same consequences, which for human beings, is just not
4 acceptable.

5 WALLY RENFRO: That makes sense. We don't want to do
6 away with the science. The science itself has the potential
7 for some incredibly wonderful outcomes. But we do have to
8 think about how you extend that science in ways that creates a
9 type of human being that's a super athlete, but that maybe,
10 you know, is not prepared to carry what that really implies.

11 DR. MYLES BRAND: You know, some people would argue
12 that gene manipulation, cloning, if you like, as one example,
13 is totally unacceptable for religious reasons or other
14 reasons. That is not the argument I'm making. I believe that
15 there are some real opportunities in medical science to
16 relieve human suffering.

17 But the goals at which you undertake this and the
18 possibility of misuse and the suffering that can come from it
19 is very serious. So that speaks to me about making sure that
20 we have appropriate safeguards and regulations and oversight
21 in place so that we don't get this kind of activity here.

22 WALLY RENFRO: You know, you've never found an issue,
23 Myles, you know, with the athletes who have the availability
24 of very special training of, you know, body building or
25 development in a way that doesn't take into consideration

1 chemicals. You know, we have sort of drawn the line and said
2 when you get the steroids then -- you know, steroids by
3 themselves doesn't do anything. It is the steroids in
4 combination with exercise that really builds you up.

5 So we said, Yeah, even though there are athletes --
6 class of athletes who have access to that kind of training, we
7 have seen that as still a fair competition. But when we
8 introduce elements that we think are destructive to that
9 individual or that others don't want to participate in, that
10 it makes an unfair advantage.

11 With gene manipulation, we could arrive at the same
12 place. We could have a group of super-athletes that the
13 normal athletes could no longer compete with.

14 DR. MYLES BRAND: Oh, I think that is exactly right.
15 I mean, you do have the extreme possible cases I was talking
16 about, namely, that they would have very unhealthy, maybe
17 life-threatening problems.

18 But also it probably could give some individual like
19 steroid use an unfair advantage. Now, just to make it even
20 more complicated. Suppose the parents did it unbeknown to the
21 child, and so you can't really blame the athlete. They are
22 more of a victim in that case, even though that athlete may
23 have a set of genes because their parents found a way in which
24 to take advantage of the situation. So it is a very
25 complicated set of moral issues.

1 We can't draw the conclusion that some wish to draw,
2 that therefore there should be no molecular biological
3 approach to dealing with genes because there is a lot of
4 potential good that can come from that. But we also have to
5 be careful of where the lines are in terms of moral as well as
6 behaviorial activity.

7 WALLY RENFRO: And because it is so new, we are not
8 particularly well prepared to know exactly how to deal with
9 that and where to draw the lines.

10 DR. MYLES BRAND: It needs a great deal of thought.

11 JOSH CENTOR: And finally at the NCAA convention this
12 year, you spoke about the NCAA as an arbiter for social change
13 and social justice. And it seems that this is something that,
14 Wally, you just said we're on the very forefront of it, but
15 that's the type of thinking that goes on.

16 DR. MYLES BRAND: I think so. And, of course, this
17 isn't merely about college student-athletes or even high
18 school student-athletes. It is about professionals, as well.
19 Because one of the reasons that people will want to do this is
20 to become very wealthy through their athletic abilities.

21 And so it has a consequence that reaches beyond just
22 the college level. And everyone interested in sports, as well
23 as many other endeavors in life, are going to have to pay
24 attention to what's going on.

25 JOSH CENTOR: All right. Dr. Brand, Mr. Renfro, thank

1 you so much. A really great conversation.
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