



Never Used Steroids, Ortiz says

Ten days after the New York Times reported that his name is on a list of players who tested positive for performance-enhancing drugs six years ago, Boston Red Sox slugger David Ortiz said he still doesn't know what forbidden substances he supposedly used.

"I was a little bit careless back in those days when I was buying supplements and vitamins, over the counter," Ortiz said at a Saturday afternoon press conference at Yankee Stadium, where the Red Sox were playing a weekend series with their New York rivals. "Legal supplements, legal vitamins. Over the counter. But I never bought steroids or used steroids."



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On July 30, the *Times* reported that both Ortiz and his former Boston teammate Manny Ramirez were among the players with positive results in what was supposed to have been a confidential testing for use of performance-enhancing drugs, administered by Major League Baseball during the 2003 season. When the story broke, Ortiz promised to speak to the issue as soon as he had more information. But on Saturday he said he was still in the dark.

"David Ortiz doesn't know whether anything he took had any effect on his 2003 test," said Michael Weiner, general counsel for the Major League Baseball Players Association. "That's the unfairness of this situation. His reputation has been called into question. He does not know specifically why and he can't get the information to offer a full explanation."

Just who does have the information and who is leaking the names of some players on the list is likewise shrouded in mystery. Government investigators took custody of the test results at some point as part of a probe into the distribution of illegal drugs to professional athletes. News reports have put the number of players on the list at 104, but Weiner disputed both the number and its meaning. The results were subject to interpretation, he said, and Major League Baseball and the Players Association reached an agreement at the time concerning the tests and how the results would be categorized.

"The number of players on the so-called 'government list' meaningfully exceeds the number of players agreed by the bargaining parties to have tested positive," Weiner said. There were 83 tests indicating use of performance-enhancing drugs, while another 13 were inconclusive, he said. The numbers refer to the number of tests and not players, he added, since the tests consisted of two samplings and some players may have tested positive twice.

Ortiz, the Red Sox designated hitter and occasional first baseman, came to the Red Sox in 2003, when he became a friend and teammate of Manny Ramirez. Ramirez, now with the Dodgers, was suspended for 50 games this season for use of a fertility drug allegedly used to conceal evidence of steroid use. After several unremarkable seasons with the Minnesota Twins, Ortiz became one of the game's most



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feared hitters with the Red Sox, hitting 54 homeruns in 2006. His production has tailed off the last two seasons, due in part to a nagging wrist injury.

Major League Baseball and the Players Association agreed to the anonymous drug testing in 2003 to determine the extent of the problem of performance-enhancing drugs in baseball. Under the agreement, if more than five percent of the tests were positive, mandatory testing with penalties would be instituted the following year. The two sides disputed the results of some of the tests, but the number testing positive was never settled, since both sides agreed that it exceeded five percent.

The players' union is in a legal fight to get the test results back from the government. If it succeeds, the union will likely accommodate requests from players on the list to be informed of what drugs they were said to have used, Weiner said. In what appears to be a protracted legal contest, three U.S. District Courts have sided with the union, saying that the government must return the records. Prosecutors have appealed and the case was heard the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco last December. A decision is still pending.

Along with the confusion over who supposedly took what are uncertainties about the tests themselves, Weiner said. At the time, "legally available nutritional supplements could trigger an initial 'positive' test under our program," Weiner said. In addition, some drugs now banned were legal six years ago. Testing methods have also changed, the union lawyer said. "The more definitive methods that are utilized by the lab that administers the current drug agreement were not utilized by the lab responsible for the anonymous testing program in 2003," he said.

The government seizure of the test results, meanwhile, has cast a cloud over all of major league baseball and violated the promise of anonymity the players received when they submitted to the '03 testing. No one would know their players' personal test results — except, as it turns out, their friendly federal government.

Photo of David Ortiz: AP Images



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