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## Lessons from the steroid headlines

Union College class explores sports doping

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**SCHENECTADY --** For cyclist Floyd Landis, the doping hearing that began Monday could be the final climb in a 10-month campaign to salvage his Tour de France title from cheating charges.

For Union College professor Tom Werner, the case is a compelling way to teach chemistry.

It's got questionable science. Personality conflicts. Politics.

And the story only got sexier last week when Landis claimed the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency offered him leniency to dish incriminating information about seven-time Tour winner Lance Armstrong.

"It's got everything," Werner told his students Monday. "And so it will be very, very interesting to see how all this plays out."

It'll be playing out in real time for the 19 students following the ripped-from-the-headlines "living syllabus" in Werner's class.

The new course, "Chemistry and Athletic Performance," looks at the cat-and-mouse competition between the athletes who dope and the scientists and sports administrators who try to catch them. Werner knows of no other class like it.

Monday the periodic table hung in the corner while a projector flashed lecture notes with headings like "Ways to Blood Dope" and "Scandals and Cycling: How did it Come to This?"

"It's pretty interesting -- it's not your standard chemistry course," said John Ferrarone, 22, a chemistry major and former football player.

Werner developed the course in part because he feels professors could do better at linking classroom chemistry to the outside world. The 36-year Union veteran linked up with the California lab that's considered the gold standard for performance drug analysis: The U.S. Olympic Testing Laboratory at UCLA.

The lab's leader until recently, Don Catlin, performed the chemical sleuthing central to the Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative (BALCO) investigation involving alleged doping by Barry Bonds, Jason Giambi and others.

Catlin plays a role in the best-selling book about that case, "Game of Shadows." Catlin and his staff helped Werner develop the course, which uses "Game of Shadows" as a text. Werner spent part of February at Catlin's lab observing its operation.

Beyond molecules, Werner is also a devoted observer of baseballs. The 64-year-old used to worship Mickey Mantle. He defected to Red Sox Nation while studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

In class, Werner delves into the chemistry of how banned substances work. He calls it a "really attractive topic" for students, who tend to enjoy talking about drugs.

But he also poses broader questions about sports doping.

Why do we care when an athlete cheats? How do anti-cheating policies differ between sports? How do fans react to cheating scandals among different sports?

The Landis case is a natural vehicle to explore both the science and the human story because of the approach he has taken to arguing his innocence.

It's been called the "Wiki Defense," a term that echoes the user-written Internet encyclopedia called Wikipedia. Landis posted 370 pages of testing documents on the Internet, material Werner makes use of in class. Landis also chose to hold the hearing that began Monday in public.

As the Web site of his "Floyd Fairness Fund" puts it, Landis is encouraging "discussion by experts and laymen alike."

In class Monday, the discussion was largely about BALCO. Werner asked whether students felt those who served jail time in the case got what they deserved.

"I would say it fits the crime," Ferrarone said. "You have to consider, of the drug being dealt, what portion of the population does this affect? We're talking about athletes, which is a very, very narrow portion of America. Whereas like a cocaine dealer or a pot dealer, that's going to be distributed to a much larger audience."

Ferrarone's classmate William Tamparo added: "I love Barry Bonds. After reading this book, I kind of look at him differently."

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