

Massive Drop in Baseball Drug Suspensions Could Signal Hope

Written by Maury Brown
Friday, 28 June 2013 12:54



UPDATE: Shortly after publication of this article, Cleveland Indians Minor League right-handed pitcher Dillon Howard received a 50-game suspension without pay after testing positive for an Amphetamine. The suspension of Howard, who is currently on the roster of the rookie-level Arizona League Indians, is effective immediately. The article has been updated to reflect the additional suspension.

[Alex Rodriguez](#) , [Ryan Braun](#) , and up to 20 players could see suspensions in Major League Baseball, but a funny thing has happened along the way that few have seen, and might have a more lasting impact: drug suspensions across baseball are down dramatically this year.

The reason for the drop, where it is occurring, and other facets may be a one year phenomenon or a continuing trend, but as it stands now we're seeing the largest drop in drug suspensions across minor league baseball, and to date, there have been none in the majors. As one key official said, "Hopefully the message is getting through."

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How dramatic is this change? To date, there have been 24 drug suspensions in minor league

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baseball. Last season at this time there were 50 in the minors, and thus year-over-year there has been a decline of 54 percent. The key here is that players in the minors have no recourse through challenges to suspensions such as players in the Majors have via unionization.

[At this point last season](#) , there had been three suspensions against the Major League drug policy ([Guillermo Mota](#) of the Giants, 100 games for Clenbuterol - [Freddy Galvis](#) of the Phillies, 50 games for metabolite of Clostebol, and [Marlon Byrd](#) who was a free agent at the time, 50 games for Tamoxifen). And, technically, there was four. [Eliezer Alfonzo](#) of the Rockies had his 100 game suspension for elevated levels of Testosterone rescinded. While the Biogenesis case is still looming, thus far in 2013 there have been none in the Majors.

A large percentage in this drop across the Minors centers on “drug of abuse”. These are suspensions around street drugs as opposed to PEDs. There have been 8 for drug of abuse thus far in the Minors. In 2012 it was 20 at this date on the calendar, which accounted for 40 percent of the total suspensions.

The question will be how suspensions play out of the Dominican and Venezuelan Summer Leagues where a large majority of suspensions occur across baseball. As of today there have been just three suspensions (two out of the DSL and one out of the VSL), with there being four out of the DSL and one out of the VSL at this point last year. With those leagues seeing a spike in suspensions in July and August, it's too soon to know if there will be a decline or increase this year.

It is early in the year, and it's unclear if this will be something that will continue over the long haul, but one can hope that as the official put it, the message is getting across. It's also always going to be a case of cat and mouse between the chemists coming up with the designer PED cocktails that MLB players are likely to use, and those doing the testing. For now, that game continues.



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