Part 1. The Four Key Questions

What is the ethical question?
What should Carl do? Should he take the steroids?

What are the relevant facts?
Examples may include
• the health risks of steroids;
• the fact that they only work to build muscle and strength if the athlete continues to train while taking them; and
• that they are currently illegal in the United States if used in ways not prescribed by a doctor.

There are also facts pertinent to Carl’s specific situation—such as the facts that
• others on the team might be using steroids;
• he will only use them for a short period, while he is recovering from an injury; and
• he might get a college scholarship if he performs well this season.

Who or what could be affected by how the question is resolved?
• Carl
• Carl’s family
• Carl’s teammates (both present and future)
• competitors (individuals and teams competing against Carl)
• other students at his school
• the school’s reputation
• athletic organizations and related organizations that regulate sports
• individuals distributing steroids

What are the relevant ethical considerations?
• Respect for Persons

In favor of Carl taking the steroids:
Society should respect Carl’s choices about his body, even if the use of steroids harms him, as long as no one else is physically harmed by his actions. He should have the liberty to make those decisions for himself.
Master 1.7 Answer Key for Carl’s Case

CONTINUED

Against Carl taking the steroids:
Society should respect Carl’s choices to a certain degree but should not allow him to make choices that can cause physical harm.

• Harms and Benefits

In favor of Carl taking the steroids:
– The opportunity for Carl to have a scholarship will have important benefits for his future.
– Carl may help the school win sports victories.

Against Carl taking the steroids:
– Carl may be physically harmed by taking the steroids.
– Carl’s use of steroids may hurt the school’s reputation and may jeopardize its athletic standings. The school’s eligibility to participate in athletic events may be revoked.

• Fairness

In favor of Carl taking the steroids:
It is fair for Carl to use the steroids, because others on his team (or on other teams in the league) are using them and he is using them to compensate for an injury.

Against Carl taking the steroids:
– It isn’t fair for Carl to use the steroids, because fairness in sports requires using your natural abilities, and taking steroids alters you in a significant way.
– Competitors who have not taken steroids may lose their own opportunities for advancement or scholarships.

• Authenticity

In favor of Carl taking the steroids:
Carl will still be his authentic self if he takes steroids. He would be using a naturally occurring substance and just using more of it until his body gets back to its normal levels after he recovers from the injury. Using steroids is no different from using other types of enhancements.

Against Carl taking the steroids:
– Carl will not be his authentic self when he takes steroids since he is altering his physical condition with something that creates a dramatic effect. Any achievements reached through such efforts are not really valid because sports rely on fair play.

• Others?

Students may also mention integrity of the sport, which is undermined when competitors take steroids.
Part 2. Position and Justification

What would you recommend be done and why?

Carl shouldn’t take the steroids.

• He is not remaining true to his authentic self. He will fundamentally alter his physical abilities by taking them. Even though he has had an injury, he should recuperate naturally rather than try to use steroids to alter his condition.
• A related reason is that taking the steroids would undermine what people most value about sports, which has to do with people challenging themselves to their maximum natural capacities and achieving their best as they naturally are. Sports rely on a shared understanding that all competitors will bring their authentic selves into the competition.
• Carl will also have to lie and sneak around to use steroids because they aren’t publicly acceptable to use in sports; this dishonesty will further damage Carl’s authenticity for himself and others, and lying is disrespectful to others.
• Another important reason why Carl shouldn’t take steroids is that they can harm him. There is scientific evidence that steroids are physically damaging.
• Carl’s use of steroids would damage the ideals of fair competition and sport.
• While it is important to respect people’s desires to have control over their own bodies, if the changes are harmful to themselves or to others (for example, other competitors or the sport itself), they should not be carried out.
• If steroid use became legal for sports enhancement, then all athletes might begin to feel pressure to take steroids, even if they personally would not have wanted to. This would create a new bar for human performance, dependent on the drug. It would also expose more people to the physical harms associated with steroids.

Carl should take the steroids.

• People should be respected for what they want to do to their own bodies, even if there may be physical risks to themselves. For example, people are allowed to make the choice to smoke and ride motorcycles, which are also potentially harmful.
• Carl is recuperating from an injury and plans to use the steroids only until he is up to his normal level. He doesn’t intend to make himself better than he was. The injury hurt his chances at a well-deserved scholarship—the temporary use of steroids would help him get back to the condition he was in before the injury. The steroids do not give him an advantage over others but, rather, equalize the playing field, since they bring him up to his normal level of operation.
• Taking steroids doesn’t mean that Carl can be lazy. He will still have to work out and train hard.
• In addition, Carl has strong obligations to his team and to his school. He needs to be the best he can be for the sake of his teammates.