There's a burgeoning story about performance-enhancing drugs that no one is likely to much care about, but they should.

ESPN is reporting in great detail the case involving Anthony Galea, a Canadian doctor charged in U.S. federal court in Buffalo on Tuesday with drug smuggling and other related drug offenses. The story is big enough on its own, but it also has an interesting Cleveland connection.

Galea's arrest is the result of an investigation that began last fall when his assistant, Mary Anne Catalano, his former executive assistant, was arrested at the U.S./Canadian border for trying to smuggle into this country a variety of performance-enhancing drugs. Catalano has become an informant, probably in an attempt to gain leniency, and has been a virtual treasure trove of information for the FBI.

According to the ESPN story, documents they obtained show that while Galea criss-crossed the country treating elite athletes with his own brand of voodoo and cocktails laced with human growth hormone, one of Galea's most frequent stops was in Cleveland.

Galea allegedly was in Cleveland nearly a dozen times between July 22 and September 11 administering medical treatments of some sort to 11 different athletes never mind the fact that Galea isn't even registered to practice medicine in this country.

Not surprisingly, this little gem of a story has eluded the notice of the local press. After all, there's stories aplenty to write about D'Qwell Jackson and the fact that he isn't attending

mini-camp. It sometimes makes me wonder whether the local press has just given up on its own agonizingly slow death march toward extinction.

Because court documents don't name the athletes allegedly treated by Galea, there's no way to know at this point whether these athletes played for Cleveland teams or were just visiting. Likewise it's not known at this point the sports they participated in though the timeline suggests that both baseball and football players were likely involved.

What is known though is that during this period, any number of Cleveland Indians' players were either on the disabled list or nursing injuries, players like Grady Sizemore, Travis Hafner, Anthony Reyes, Aaron Laffey, Asdrubal Cabrera and Rafael Bentancourt, to name a few. That doesn't mean any of them were treated inappropriately. It doesn't mean that any of them were ever seen by Galea or that they even know him. But it does mean that it is now fair game to ask the question, just don't wait for the Plain Dealer to do it.

Likewise with the Browns. Although the Browns had just entered training camp during this time period, there were a number of its players being treated for a variety of ailments. This included Robaire Smith, Jamal Lewis, Shaun Rogers, Ryan Tucker, Brodney Pool and Jerome Harrison, among others.

Again, it's important to point out that none of these players have ever been linked with Galea or that no questions have been raised about the appropriateness of any of their treatments. But given Galea's frequent visits to Cleveland during this period, raising the question is completely appropriate.

Let's also not forget that during this time period the Indians had home series against Detroit, Minnesota, Texas, Anaheim, Seattle and Kansas City. Given Galea's geographic location, Toronto, and its easy access to Cleveland it could very well be that Galea was seeing players from these teams instead. It would be interesting to know which injured players from these teams were traveling with them from this time period but I doubt you can get anyone from the Plain Dealer interested in investigating that, either.

None of this is good news for sports fans in any of these cities, but as I said at the outset, most won't see it that way, including the "established" media, save ESPN. Stories about performance

enhancing drugs are nearly as common as stories about LeBron James' free agent status. At some point people just tune them out.

But it is important because it goes directly to the integrity of each sport. When some players are being fed illegal drugs in order to enhance performance, the product on the field is fraudulent. The competition is no longer between teams with the best players but teams with the best enhanced players. That's why the story breaking now, again by ESPN, regarding Floyd Landis' years-too-late admission that he was a serial drug cheat, is eye-opening. For too long the French have been accused of being on a witch hunt and yet they were right all along.

The Galea story isn't good news either for the commissioners of Major League Baseball and the National Football League. Once again their sports are tainted by another drug scandal, just emphasizing the point that whatever they think they're doing to clean up their sports isn't working as well as they'd like to believe.

Particularly shameful in this regard is the legacy of Major League Baseball. Under Commissioner Bud Selig, the league has become mostly a joke when it comes to drugs. I've seen several revisionists lately take their hand at trying to position Selig as perhaps the greatest commissioner baseball has ever seen. But every time I read one of these works of fiction they always seem to gloss over how weak-kneed Selig was in the war on drugs, particularly when faced with union opposition.

It was only the threat of Congressional action that got Selig really moving and even then the sport still has a weaker drug testing program than any other sport. Again that's attributable to Selig's almost abject unwillingness to back up tough talk with tough action. He's never shown much of a willingness to take on a misguided union on these issues. Improvements have come at a glacial pace and been merely incremental.

Football has a slightly better story to tell, but only slightly. It embraced more stringent drug testing and harsher penalties well ahead of baseball. The problem, though, is that it hasn't seemed to deter players hell bent on gaining an illegal advantage. Meanwhile, most seem to just shrug it off.

Consider, for example, that just a few weeks ago, Brian Cushing, the rookie linebacker from the

Houston Texans, was revealed as a drug cheat. Cushing had won the Associated Press defensive rookie of the year award with 39 of 50 possible votes. That was before his positive test was known. Last week, in an unprecedented move, the Associated Press ordered a re-vote on its award and Cushing won again, although with far less votes.

The fact that Cushing won again feeds the perception that too many sportswriters are athlete-wannabees that help foster a permissive drug culture inside the locker room because taking a tough stance might not get them the access to the players that they think they need.

But perhaps even more farcical was the handwringing from some of those same sportswriters about a re-vote even taking place. To them, the unprecedented nature of the re-vote was a far more serious issue than the fact that Cushing's performance was artificially enhanced. Talk about misplaced priorities from your working press.

That really is what underscores the entire issue here. The local beat reporters for both the Indians and the Browns haven't even bothered with this story despite its Cleveland connection. If you can't get the working press that covers these athletes on a daily basis to give a damn and be an agent for pushing real reform, what chance does the average fan have? It was this working press, both locally and nationally, that ignored the raging use of PEDs in baseball for years and now are repeating the same mistake by still rewarding known drug users like Cushing for performing at a level he might not otherwise have achieved without the PEDs.

Meanwhile, it's not just football and baseball that are at the center of the storm involving Galea. It's worth remembering that another one of Galea's high profile clients is none other than Tiger Woods. When Woods made his now infamous mostly-wooden apology for being a serial cheater on his wife and family he did save real emotion in that well-rehearsed speech when he denied, without being asked, that treatments he received by Galea involved illegal drugs. Translation: It's one thing to cheat on your wife, another on your sport.

Court documents seem to suggest that Woods is "Athlete D" administered to in July in Orlando with the so-called plasma rich platelet treatment. According to reports, this involves a process by which blood is taken from the athlete, the platelets are separated from the red blood cells with a centrifuge and then injected back into the athlete to accelerate healing.

It all sounds a little Battlestar Galactica but not illegal, except perhaps for the fact that it was done by someone not licensed to do so, someone like Galea. Whether Woods is a cheat depends on how you come out on the question of whether or not it's cheating to have a legal treatment administered illegally. We know what Woods thinks but his judgment isn't exactly unbiased. Of course the same goes for another of sports' shadier characters, Alex Rodriguez, also a patient of Galea.

Eventually this story will go away. Galea will likely plead guilty to some sort of crime or two and the athletes involved aren't likely to suffer either way. It's funny. In this country a young person can be permanently rendered ineligible for federal financial aid for college if he or she is convicted of even minor drug possession charges. Meanwhile professional athletes, many the same age as these same college kids, find that even far more dangerous drug use on their part ends up being merely a minor speed bump on their way to backing up a Brinks truck to the owner's suite.