



Highlights

Fall/Winter 2010

CONCUSSION IN SPORTS

AS A COACH, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO PREVENT CONCUSSIONS?

From the Centers for Disease Control

As a coach or parent, you play a key role in preventing concussions and responding properly when they occur. Here are some steps you can take to help prevent concussions and ensure the best outcome for your athletes, the team, league, or school.

Preseason

Check with your league, school, or district about concussion policies.

Concussion policy statements can be developed to include a commitment to safety, a brief description about concussion, and information on when athletes can safely return to play (i.e. an athlete should be kept out of play the day of the injury and until a healthcare



professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play). Parents and athletes should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of each sports season.

Involve and get support from other parents and/or league or school officials to help ensure that the concussion policy is in place before the first practice.

Create a concussion

action plan. To ensure that concussions are identified early and managed correctly, have an action plan in place before the season starts. This plan can be included in your school or district's concussion policy.

Educate athletes and other parents or coaches about concussion.

Before the first practice, talk to athletes and parents, and other coaches and school officials about the dangers of concussion and potential

long-term consequences of concussion. Explain your concerns about concussion and your expectations of safe play. Show videos and pass out concussion fact sheets for athletes and for parents at the beginning of the season and again if a concussion occurs. Remind athletes to tell coaching staff right away if they suspect they have a concussion or that a teammate has a concussion.

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Monitor the health of your athletes.

Make sure to ask if an athlete has ever had a concussion and insist that your athletes are medically evaluated and are in good condition to participate. Some schools and leagues conduct preseason baseline testing (also known as neurocognitive tests) to assess brain function — learning and memory skills, ability to pay attention or concentrate, and how quickly someone can think and solve problems. These tests can be used again during the season if an athlete has a concussion to help identify the effects of the injury. Prior to the first practice, determine whether your school or league would consider conducting baseline testing.

During the Season: Practices and Games

Insist that safety comes first.

- Teach and practice safe playing techniques.
- Encourage athletes to follow the rules of play and to practice good sportsmanship at all times.

- Make sure athletes wear the right protective equipment for their activity (such as helmets, padding, shin guards, and eye and mouth guards). Protective equipment should fit properly, be well maintained, and be worn consistently and correctly.

Teach athletes it's not smart to play with a concussion. Rest is key after a concussion. Sometimes athletes, parents, and other school or league officials wrongly believe that it shows strength and courage to play injured. Discourage others from pressuring injured athletes to play. Don't let your athlete convince you that they're "just fine."

Prevent long-term problems. If an athlete has a concussion, their brain needs time to heal. Don't let them return to play the day of the injury and until a healthcare professional, experienced in evaluating for concussion, says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first — usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks) — can slow recovery or increase the chances for long-term problems.

Work closely with league or school officials. Be sure that appropriate individuals are available for injury assessment and referrals for further medical care. Enlist health care professionals (including school nurses) to monitor any changes in the athlete's behavior that could indicate that they have a concussion. Ask athletes or parents to report concussions that occurred during any sport or recreation activity. This will help in monitoring injured athletes who participate in multiple sports throughout the year.

Postseason

Keep track of concussion. Coaches should work with other school or league officials to review injuries that occurred during the season. Discuss with others any needs for better concussion prevention or response preparations.

Review your concussion policy and action plan. Discuss any need for improvements in your concussion policy or action plan with appropriate healthcare professionals and school and league officials. 🌟

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH EMOTIONS OF INJURED ATHLETES

By Nathan Burnett, ATC

We know injuries are common in sports. Having a healthy team often plays a big role in winning championships. On the other hand, the opposite is also true. A team with many injuries tends to struggle. Dealing with injured athletes is something all coaches have to do. Here are five tips that may help you when interacting with your injured athletes and assist in their recovery.

1 Know your athletes. Know their personalities, their approach to overcoming difficult tasks or adversity. Understanding why one athlete

takes much longer than another to recover from what seems to be the same type of injury is often hard. We may assume the athlete may not be as mentally tough or doesn't want to return to play. We must not ASSUME to know what is in the mind or heart of an athlete, but rather seek to find out. No two injuries are the same, as no two athletes are. We tend to frame our expectations from our experiences, either from observing injuries over the years or from our own injuries. While these experiences may help us in understanding the process of rehabilitation and some of the psychological aspects of injury, we must

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remember that those experiences have their limitations. If you have doubts as to an athlete's compliance with rehab or whether or not she is progressing as anticipated, find out. Take time to communicate with the athlete directly to gauge her attitude and progress. Most adolescent athletes are not so different from other adolescents. They may have difficulty opening up, communicating their own fears, and understanding their injury and the path

to recovery. If a young athlete has trouble opening up to his or her parents, he may also have trouble opening up to a coach. An athlete may be afraid of losing your respect if he talks about an injury, or he may fear he is less important to you now that he is injured.

2 *Be familiar with the psychological aspects of injury.* A grief model observed in terminally ill patients is sometimes also witnessed in sports injuries. These stages are: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. These are not necessarily

progressive stages, but more like cycles the injured athlete may go through several times, skipping through different parts or even exhibiting multiple stages simultaneously. You might assume this only applies to severe injuries; however, in the mind of the young athlete, severity is very subjective. Not being able to play for two weeks can seem like a very long time to an athlete, especially when it involves missing competitions or post-season play. So despite the true severity of the injury, or whether the injured athlete is out of play for two

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STRENGTH TRAINING FOR YOUTH: IS IT SAFE?

By Travis Jackson, ATC

Early literature suggested that weight training might be inappropriate for young athletes. Developing musculoskeletal structures in youth are uniquely susceptible to injury, particularly at the epiphysis (growth plate) area. These growth plates are present in arm and leg bones, and some may not close until the late teen years. However, recent evidence suggests that, properly done, strength/resistance training may not only be safe, it may also help reduce the risk of injury for young athletes.


Studies show that when youth engage in supervised short-term concentric workouts they will see results in their strength training that lower the injury rate and that do not adversely affect bone, muscle, or growth plates. Nor does this type of exercise adversely affect growth, development, flexibility, or motor performance in young athletes. An analysis of youth involved in concentric workouts showed significant strength gains, while a control group matched in age, sex, and activity, did not gain strength.

Since the safety question of strength training for youth is multifaceted, the previously described studies should not lead to the conclusion that strength training for youth is uniformly safe. Appropriate supervision and guidelines are necessary.

The potential benefits of strength training for youth extend beyond an increase in muscular strength and may include favorable changes in selected health-and-fitness-related measures. If appropriate training guidelines are followed, regular participation in a youth strength-training program has the potential to increase bone mineral density, improve motor performance skills, enhance sports performance, and better prepare young athletes for the demands of practice and competition.

Despite earlier concerns regarding the safety and effectiveness of youth strength training, current public health objectives now aim to increase the



number of boys and girls age 6 and older who regularly participate in physical activities that enhance and maintain muscular fitness. Parents, teachers, coaches, and healthcare providers should realize that youth strength training is a specialized method of conditioning that can offer enormous benefit, but at the same time, can result in serious injury if established guidelines are not followed. With qualified instruction, competent supervision, and an appropriate progression of the volume and intensity of training, young athletes not only learn advanced strength training exercises, but can feel good about their performances — and have fun. 

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weeks or one year, the psychological severity of the injury must also be considered.

Further, to the young athlete an injury can be quite literally a traumatic loss. An athlete gains a sense of identity linked to the sport she plays. She may define herself in terms of being a basketball or softball player, for example. Sport is where she has her social peer group, a sense of belonging, and identity. It can also be her favorite hobby or activity or a coping mechanism for stress. This may all seem to be lost to the athlete following an injury and greatly intensifies the psychological trauma. Remember that to her, this particular injury may be the first time she has ever sprained an ankle, for example, or had to miss a competition due to injury, even though to other athletes this scenario may be witnessed many times and seems very commonplace.

3 **Involve the athlete in team activities.** Try to have as much rehab as possible performed where the team is practicing. This allows the athlete to still feel involved and to be at practice, and also allows teammates to see that he is working to recover. Too often, if all the rehab is done in the training room, no one sees the work that takes place and feelings of isolation and distance may develop. Allow the athlete to be involved in as much of practice as is reasonable considering the nature of his injury. This may be holding a clipboard, running a clock, or helping a teammate understand something. Communicate clearly what your expectations are concerning his involvement with the team. If he still needs to be at practice the entire time and on time for example, encourage him to do so as an active member of the team. Help him to be involved by including him, especially in off-the-field/court activities.

4 **Be positive.** Setbacks and frustrations are part of the rehab process. Be aware of goals being

set by the athlete for progress and eventual return to play. Encourage her toward those goals and help her be positive. Also, be aware that the athlete may feel pressure to make it back by a certain date or game and feel like a failure if unable to do so. Try to not let your encouragement be taken as pressure to return before she is ready. Recovery from injury provides a time perhaps like no other to develop trust with that athlete. She may become convinced of a coach's indifference or conditional concern if she is ignored during this time or have some indication that her value to the coach is linked to her ability to perform in that sport. As a coach, feeling frustrated when an athlete is injured is normal. There is never

“Helping athletes know how to cope with injuries and having a positive support group of coaches and teammates allows the injury to become a growing experience.”

a “good” time for an injury to occur. There is a danger, however, that this frustration will be misunderstood by the athlete as resentment of herself or her willingness to play. Positive reinforcement by a coach can encourage an athlete to keep working.

5 **Communicate support of the injured athlete to the team.** This means more than just relaying the facts of the injury to the team. Teams that support an injured athlete make it easier for him to return, as well as reducing anxiety of other athletes on that team of possibly being injured in the future. Injured athletes commonly feel unsupported by teammates. This may be due to the teammates' misunderstanding the nature or severity of

the injury, not knowing how to act when around the injured athlete, or competing for his playing time. If teammates feel an athlete is not tough, appears “happy” to be out, or is using the injury as an excuse, they lose respect for him and they don't support him. Those negative feelings will often spread to others. This can interfere with the proper re-integration of the athlete back into the team. A coach can avoid these negative feelings and issues by communicating expectations with both the injured athlete and healthy teammates.

Many of the sports psychology or motivational techniques learned and used by coaches can be applied to the rehab process where appropriate. Mental imagery, watching film, visualization, positive self talk, relaxation, and other mental training techniques can all be useful in the psychological aspect of rehabilitation. The athlete may take some time to mentally overcome an injury, even long after the physical aspects are resolved. Taking time to identify possible barriers and showing patience are needed. Try to work with athletic trainers and sports psychologists if problems persist. While some athletes will use an injury as an excuse and spend what seems like an excessive amount of time in the athletic training room, others are simply often injured. If she is hiding or making the injury an excuse, the better approach is to try to find out “why” in a constructive manner. As a coach, if you give up on injured athlete, she may also just give up and quit trying.

Many athletes will be injured at some point in their athletic career. Helping them know how to cope with these injuries and having a positive support group of coaches and teammates improves the quality of compliance to the rehabilitation process and allows the injury to become a growing experience. Overcoming obstacles and adversity such as injuries is a great life lesson that can be learned through sport if approached with the right amount of positive support. 