

Athletic Trainers: Unsung Heroes of High School Sports

By Alexis Grilli

REGION — Certified athletic trainers are medical experts in preventing, recognizing and rehabilitating injuries that result from physical activity.

Athletic trainers also help athletes avoid unnecessary medical treatment and disruption of a normal daily life.

Mike Casey, athletic trainer at Downingtown East, said that a great deal of his position involves working with the students' psyche. During treatment the athletic trainer must "get the kids motivated and keep their spirits up," said Casey. William Mills, assistant athletic director and athletic trainer at Malvern Prep, feels that this relationship between athletes and their athletic trainers is the greatest asset of the job. "You see the injury, you rehab them and then you get to see them back at what they love," said Mills.

Student athletes equally value the relationships that they establish with their (athletic) trainers. "Without him (Casey) I probably wouldn't be able to move my leg again," said Bree Bringham, a soccer player at East. Although passionate about their jobs, the athletic trainers attest that their position requires a great deal of commitment. "Because you're in the medical field you should always be available," Mills said.

Brian McCloskey, athletic trainer at West Chester Henderson, reports that he directly treats "approximately 50 to 60 kids a



Photo courtesy of Christopher Grosskopf, ATC

day." McCloskey's day is essentially broken down into two parts. He spends part of his day in the school with "evaluations, treatments, and rehab." The second part of the day involves preparing athletes for games and practice. "Some players need to be taped and stretched out for practice," said McCloskey. McCloskey works with teams pre-season to instruct them on proper warm-up. He also teaches preventative measures. Some of the measures are relevant to all the sports, while others are relative. McCloskey encourages most sports teams to wear mouth guards.

Basketball players are urged to use ankle

braces before an injury occurs. Specific instructions for football players include keeping salt in their diets. Players must also weigh in and weigh out. In early fall McCloskey emphasizes the importance of recognizing and treating heat illness. He tells teams when and how to hydrate.

Kathleen Walsh-Shell, athletic trainer at Villa Maria, begins preventive medicine with her students during the summer. "We try to have a summer conditioning program," Walsh-Shell said. It focuses on strength and flexibility. Walsh-Shell attributes the rate of injuries to students' participation in pre-season training. "If the girls are in better shape there tends to be less injury," said Walsh-Shell.

There are, however, drawbacks to off-season practice. "Off-season used to give athletes time to heal," said Casey. Casey now sees a lot of injuries from athletes who "come into the season injured."

Nicole Day is one of several athletes from Downingtown East that is going through rehabilitation for anterior crucial ligament injuries. She injured herself crossing a soccer ball earlier this year and inevitably "kept playing on it." This is Day's second time through rehab for an ACL injury. The close relationship she has with her (athletic) trainers clearly assists in keeping her spirits up, even throughout an obviously painful rehabilitation.

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About the NATA:

Certified athletic trainers (ATCs) are unique health care providers who specialize in the prevention, assessment, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and illnesses that occur to athletes and the physically active. The National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports the 30,000 members of the athletic training profession through education and research. www.nata.org. NATA, 2952 Stemmons Freeway, Ste. 200, Dallas, TX 75247, 214.637.6282; 214.637.2206 (fax).