

Athletic trainers: A routine job with life-or-death moments



By [Nolan Weidner, The Post-Standard](#)

on March 29, 2012 at 12:53 PM, updated March 29, 2012 at 2:02 PM

[Print](#)

[View/Post Comments](#)



Frank Ordoñez / The Post-Standard

Tim Neal, Syracuse University's assistant athletics director for sports medicine, talks with head football coach Doug Marrone during a preseason Orange scrimmage last August.

Syracuse -- Cyndi Kelder is still reaping the rewards for her part in a life-saving drama last summer on the Fayetteville-Manlius athletic fields.

A self-described Wegmans addict, the F-M assistant athletic trainer often strolls the aisles of the mega-grocery in DeWitt. Occasionally she spots teenager Dan Cochran stocking the shelves.

They don't always talk. But just seeing the 16-year-old at work is enough of a pat on the back for Kelder, one of four people who helped to revive Cochran after he suffered a medical event called commotio cordis last June when he was struck in the chest with a lacrosse ball during tryouts for a local all-star team.

"Sometimes I'll just pass by and be happy," said Kelder, who administered the Automated External Defibrillator shock that rebooted the teen's heart. "There he is, stocking the candy bars."

March is Athletic Training Month, and the theme is "Athletic trainers save lives."

While Kelder's daily routine at F-M is heavily tilted toward relatively thankless tasks such as taping ankles and evaluating minor sports injuries, being prepared for matters of life and death is also part of the job - a role she's much more aware of these days.

"It was definitely scary," said Kelder, who is in her eighth year at F-M. "You get in a routine of what you do. The catastrophic things ... you can go through a whole career and never have one. For me, it was a real big

awakening."

Kelder was on duty the evening of June 15 only because she was hired outside of her work with the school to be present at tryouts for a lacrosse all-star team. Cochran, then a sophomore at Jamesville-DeWitt, was struck in the chest by a shot that caused the interruption of his heart rhythm.

Rome Free Academy lacrosse coaches Guy Calandra and Jeremy Roberts, along with registered nurse Daniela Reilly, were already administering CPR when Kelder stuck the AED pads on Cochran's chest.



Cyndi Kelder

"We probably couldn't do a run-through of that day and have it go as smoothly as it went. And the great thing is we didn't even know each other," Kelder said. "It was kind of just all of the protocols you learn with CPR and all of that. There was no thinking."

Tim Neal, assistant director of athletics for sports medicine at Syracuse University, said that suddenness is why he is all business when on duty at Orange football games and other events.

"I've seen lots of emergencies in my career, and they can happen in the snap of a finger," he said. "So I'm not texting people, I'm not talking on my cell phone, I'm paying attention to exactly what's going on in front of me. I look for anything that stands out and move quickly on it."

It's not always a player who needs the help.

Neal was involved in a 2001 event that made national headlines when he used an AED to help save the life of football official Gerry Bram, who had collapsed on the Carrier Dome field after a heart attack during a game between SU and East Carolina.

The incident, which happened during a nationally televised game, came at a time when AEDs were new at many schools. Neal said SU had just received its devices prior to the start of the 2001 football season.

In the wake of that incident, Neal said, he heard from 18 colleges that later bought and deployed the devices.

"There has to be an awareness and a vigilance," Neal said. "Emergencies are very rare in athletic training, but we're trained to take care of those things."

Bram, who lives in the Philadelphia suburb of Southampton, didn't return to officiating on the field, but he still works games as a replay official for the Mid-American and Big Ten conferences. He's had an implanted defibrillator the past eight years and said he gets along fine.

After his 2001 incident, Bram said he was such a believer in AEDs that he tried to get a job with Phillips, a company that manufactures them. He was turned down after six interviews, he said, because the company

didn't feel he had enough technical knowledge.

Bram said he is, of course, grateful things turned out the way they did. He said he still runs into people who were either at the game or saw it on television.

But the times he feels most thankful for the devices, and those trained to use them, are when he's with his first grandchild, Jayson Matthew Kelly, who was born 20 months ago.

As for Cochran, he never stopped playing lacrosse.

His mother, Danielle Boland, said Dan went back to playing last year and just started practicing with the J-D varsity lacrosse team for the spring season. He recently got his learner's permit so he can begin driving.

"It's something I'll never forget," she said. "We had a very happy ending."

Nolan Weidner can be reached at 470-3250 or nweidner@syracuse.com.

[View/Post Comments](#)

© syracuse.com. All rights reserved.