

## Pediatricians confirm enormous value of athletic trainers at high schools

NOVEMBER 05, 2012 8:00 PM • [JOHN DOHERTY TIMES SPORTS CORRESPONDENT](#)

Two weeks ago, the American Academy of Pediatrics' annual membership meeting in New Orleans featured a position statement, reported on in this space at the time, on cheerleader safety.

However at the same meeting, a yet-to-be published study was presented and it has generated as much, if not more, publicity since. Done at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, the study compared high school athletic programs having athletic trainers with those who do not.

Focusing specifically on girls' soccer and girls' basketball, Associate Professor of Pediatrics Cynthia LaBella, MD and her colleagues found compelling results. Long story short? Your child athlete is far better off at a school with an athletic trainer.

For the soccer players, the overall injury rate at schools with athletic trainers was only 58 percent of that at schools without an ATC. The greatest value was in preventing re-injury, with the rate of those being a mere 17 percent of that at schools lacking coverage. However, even the new injury rate was lower with covered schools having only 81 percent of the new injuries uncovered schools did.

The numbers weren't quite as dramatic in basketball but still significant.

“Athletic trainers facilitate treatment of injuries and monitor recovery so that athletes are not returned to play prematurely. This likely explains the lower rates of recurrent injuries in schools with athletic trainers,” said Dr. LaBella in an AAP press release.

A traditional role filled by athletic trainers and just as important to preventing and treating injuries, but not mentioned by LaBella, is protective strapping/taping and bracing.

While the overall injury rate was lower, one injury was diagnosed far MORE often at schools with an athletic trainer – far more often. Any guesses?

If you answered concussion, go the head of the class. Pardon the pun.

Among soccer players, they were eight times more frequent when ATCs were present and among basketball players, four-and-a-half times more frequent.

“Athletic trainers have a skill set that is very valuable,” said Dr. LaBella according to the AAP, “especially now when there is such a focus on concussions and related treatment and care. Concussed athletes are more likely to be identified in schools with athletic trainers and thus more likely to receive proper treatment.”

Whether it is a concussion or an orthopaedic injury, “proper treatment” is the key to preventing re-injury.

Consider then the relatively high frequency of torn anterior cruciate ligament injuries in both studied sports – 4-10 times greater than among boys. Consider further that the average cost of a torn ACL is \$25,000. Finally, understand that a minor knee injury, to a structure such as the medial collateral ligament, puts more stress on the ACL if the athlete is allowed to continue playing or resume playing too soon. If the presence of an athletic trainer would prevent one such ACL injury per school per year, roughly half the cost of having a full-time ATC has been covered.

Something for athletic administrators to consider at two-thirds of the high schools in this country which have inadequate or no athletic trainer coverage. Something for those same administrators – who are searching for sources of funding – to share with health and liability insurers.

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