

On-field readiness required for inevitable injuries

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By John Doherty
Times Correspondent

INDIANAPOLIS | Mike Cendoma, MS, ATC of Sports Medicine Concepts, presented his "In 2 Minutes or Less" program at the Indiana Athletic Trainers' Association summer meeting, which was held at NCAA headquarters last weekend.

Told to expect about 50 attendees, he found himself speaking to nearly 80. And while the program focused on the dos and don'ts of dealing with head and neck injuries, it also addressed the issue of general preparedness for any sudden and major medical event.

When the unthinkable does occur -- head, heart, heat or spine, to name a few -- will you or the people who should be, actually be ready? The athletic trainer is only one person. At many schools, if there is one at all, he or she may be covering multiple events. And if it isn't a fall Friday night, it isn't likely a physician will be there to help or take charge.

Consequently, Cendoma shared his checklist of sorts for everybody else on the field when the athletic trainer and doctor aren't.

Maybe not so surprisingly, he puts the athletes themselves at the top. To avoid needing medical care in the first place, Cendoma urges them to follow the rules, to get and then to stay in good condition, and to be aware of "potential situations." One such situation may occur when one teammate notices another is acting strangely, shortly after a blow to the head. At that point, the athlete should inform the athletic trainer, team doctor or coach of his concerns.

Another scenario involves serious injury. With a big field and many participants in a soccer or football game, the athletic trainer can't see everything. When a player does go down, the nearest teammate should try to determine what is wrong, summon the athletic trainer or coach, and get other teammates away. Under no circumstances should one athlete try to pick up another who hasn't offered his hand first.

Other than the athletes, those closest to the action are umpires and referees.

Much like the players, they need to be aware of potential situations.

Furthermore, being adults, they need to be prepared to render first aid to athlete or colleague after they've cleared others away and until coach or medical personnel reach the victim.

Finally, the coach needs to be the most prepared of all. For many high school coaches, most middle school coaches, and all youth level coaches, an athletic trainer is not going to be available.

Regardless of the presence of an athletic trainer, the coach still needs to understand the injury potential of his sport and take proactive steps to prevent them. Still, in spite of a coach's best efforts and intentions, injuries will occur. Then, the coach becomes an integral member of the immediate care team, in charge and capable of providing basic life support (CPR) if necessary until somebody better trained arrives.

John Doherty is a certified athletic trainer and licensed physical therapist.

This column reflects solely his opinion. Reach him at ptatcsport@sbcglobal.net.