



EMBARGOED UNTIL 10:30 AM CDT JUNE 27, 2012

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NATIONAL ATHLETIC TRAINERS' ASSOCIATION (NATA) RELEASES CONSENSUS STATEMENT GUIDELINES TO PREVENT SUDDEN DEATH DURING COLLEGIATE CONDITIONING SESSIONS

***Medical and legal experts outline recommendations during its 63rd Annual Meeting;
St. Louis Rams' Rodger Saffold offers personal perspective***

ST. LOUIS, MO., June 27, 2012 – At NATA's 63rd Annual Meeting & Clinical Symposia at the America's Center in St. Louis, leading health care professionals released inter-association task force recommendations titled, "Preventing Sudden Death in Collegiate Conditioning Sessions: Best Practices Recommendations." The guidelines will also be published in the July/August 2012 issue of the *Journal of Athletic Training*. A copy of the complete statement is available at <http://www.nata.org/sites/default/files/preventingsuddendeath-consensusstatement.pdf>.

The task force's recommendations are designed to provide physicians, athletic trainers, coaches, athletes and others with best practices for preventing sudden deaths, especially those associated with sickle cell trait, exertional heat stroke and cardiac conditions. Since 2000, 21 National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) football players have died during conditioning workouts; 75 percent of these fatalities were Division I players. Eleven out of 21 deaths occurred during day one or day two workouts.

The task force was spearheaded by the National Athletic Trainers' Association, in collaboration with the National Strength and Conditioning Association. The task force members represented numerous organizations including the American College of Emergency Physicians; American Medical Society for Sports Medicine; American Orthopaedic Society for Sports Medicine; Canadian Athletic Therapists Association; Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches association; National Collegiate Athletic Association and United States Olympic Committee, among others.

"Strength and conditioning sessions have become fundamental to success in collegiate sports, said Task Force Chair Douglas J. Casa, PhD, ATC, FNATA, FACSM, director of athletic training, University of Connecticut Neag School of Education; and chief operating officer, Korey Stringer Institute. "However, the athletes' development, health and safety are sometimes overshadowed by a culture that values making athletes tough, instilling discipline and focusing on success at all costs. This ill-conceived philosophy has been a contributor to the alarming increase in collegiate athlete deaths and serious injuries during conditioning sessions."

To combat injuries and death, the task force developed the following guidelines:

1. Progressive acclimatization is the cornerstone of safety.
2. Introduce new conditioning activities gradually.
3. Do not use exercise and conditioning activities as punishment.
4. Strength and conditioning coaches (SCCs) require proper education, experience and credentialing.
5. Provide appropriate medical coverage, including an SCC and athletic trainer.
6. Develop and practice emergency action plans (EAPs).
7. Be cognizant of athletes' medical conditions.
8. Administer strength and conditioning programs to manage health- and safety-related concerns for the student-athlete.
9. Establish a close working partnership of recognized professional organizations, including athletic, coaching, sports medicine and strength and conditioning organizations.
10. Require adequate continuing education for the entire coaching and medical teams.

According to task force member Jay R. Hoffman, PhD, CSCS, FNCSA, FACSM, RSCC, president of the National Strength and Conditioning Association; department chair of Child, Family and Community Services at the University of Central Florida and professor in the Sport and Exercise Science program, "It's vital that we administer collegiate conditioning sessions with appropriate oversight by educated and experienced strength and conditioning coaches. They in turn should work in collaboration with athletic trainers and team physicians and follow an adhered to plan of gradual acclimatization to each workout session. The task force guidelines provide us all with a clear roadmap to prevent or reduce injury or emergency and ensure a safe and healthy environment."

"Inadequate emergency preparation leading to sudden deaths in athletes also carries with it the real risk of major liability to the school or organization's administrators, teams and coaches," said Richard H. Adler, a founding principal partner of the Seattle law firm Adler Giersch and chairman of the executive board of the Brain Injury Association of Washington. "These guidelines are a great resource to prevent easily preventable tragic and catastrophic deaths, reduce financial and legal risks, and make sports more enjoyable for participants, their families and fans."

One of the task force guidelines concerns emergency action plans and appropriate medical coverage, specifically that a strength and conditioning coach (SCC) should be present during all strength and conditioning sessions and be prepared to provide first aid as soon as an athlete shows signs of distress. "An athletic trainer should also be present during each high-risk collegiate conditioning session, including sprinting, timed sessions, mat drills and stations," said task force member Ron Courson, ATC, PT, NREMT-I, CSCS, associate athletic director of Sports Medicine for the University of Georgia Athletic Association. "All personnel at strength and conditioning venues must regularly review and rehearse EAPs designed for the specific venue, sport, and circumstances in order to plan for worst-case scenarios."

Jolie C. Holschen, MD, FACEP, an emergency medicine and sports medicine physician at Infinity Healthcare in Chicago, and task force member representing the American College of Emergency Physicians, provided a team physician's perspective as to why the guidelines are important and an overview of the team physician's role in making sure conditioning sessions are safe for football players and other collegiate athletes. "It is critical for team physicians to work closely with athletic trainers and strength and conditioning coaches when an athlete has health issues, and they all need to be especially vigilant and prepared to provide first aid as soon as an athlete shows signs of distress."

Today's press conference concluded with comments by Rodger Saffold, an offensive tackle with the St. Louis Rams who was drafted from Indiana University three years ago. He gave his first-hand player's perspective on the need for safe and effective conditioning at the collegiate level and the increased attention to sports safety in professional sports. "As a former collegiate player, I often pushed myself too far and heeded the advice of athletic trainers and other medical staff on safe nutrition and exercise protocols to ensure I practiced and played at the top of my game. These guidelines today will prevent just that and I'm glad to be a part of such an important forum."

About NATA:

National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) – Health Care for Life & Sport

Athletic trainers are health care professionals who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of injuries and sport-related illnesses. They prevent and treat chronic musculoskeletal injuries from sports, physical and occupational activity, and provide immediate care for acute injuries. Athletic trainers offer a continuum of care that is unparalleled in health care. The National Athletic Trainers' Association represents and supports 35,000 members of the athletic training profession. Visit www.nata.org

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