



Division of Sports Medicine

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THE IMPORTANCE OF QUALIFIED COACHES

Parents allow coaches to make children run laps, lift weights, perform strenuous athletic tasks and engage in many other potentially injurious activities. Yet in most cases volunteer coaches are not required to have any training in injury prevention, techniques for safe training and playing or basic first aid. This unsatisfactory situation is due in part to the demand for youth sports coaches that far exceeds the supply.

The vast majority of volunteer coaches are well-meaning and committed, but most simply do not have the training they should have, even though such training is available from numerous organizations.

The most effective way to prevent sports injuries in children is to ensure that the program they are in is staffed by a trained coach. At minimum, coaches should have training in first aid and CPR and have an emergency plan in the event of serious injury.

Trained coaches know they should:

- Structure a practice session to include conditioning exercises and warm-up and cool-down periods to lessen the incidence of related injuries.
- Give ample rest periods and water breaks to prevent overheating.
- Conduct a preseason conditioning program so athletes are fit and strong enough to play the sport.
- Not push kids to the point where they injure themselves.
- Discourage tactics like face blocking in football and sliding into base in baseball or softball.
- Ensure that the team has proper equipment and facilities.
- Enforce that protective equipment is worn.
- Recognize early signs of pain and dysfunction in young athletes.
- Perform first aid or CPR if an accident occurs.
- Discourage unsafe practices such as crash diets and steroids.
- Provide appropriate motivation.

The United States Olympic Committee (USOC) has mandated that all coaches participating under the USOC "umbrella" - which includes those coaching at US Olympic Training Center facilities - will be required to receive certification in the new Sport Safety Training Course developed by the American Red Cross/USOC mentioned

PREVENTING INJURIES IN YOUTH SPORTS (CONTINUED)

below. For more information about National Governing Bodies of Sports contact the USOC, One Olympic Plaza, Colorado Springs, CO 80909, 719-632-5551.

The Red Cross/USOC course is available to all coaches including those at the grassroots level. Contact your local chapter of the American Red Cross to learn more about the Sports Safety Training course.

A coaching education fact sheet and a coaching education programs resource sheet are available from the National Youth Sports Safety Foundation. To obtain this resource visit that organization's website at www.nyssf.org. You can also contact the NYSSF at 333 Longwood Avenue, Suite 202, Boston, Massachusetts 02115. Phone: 617-277-1171, Fax: 617-277-2278, E-Mail: NYSSF@aol.com.

Certification of coaches will eventually come to this country. When it does, it will be a win, win, win situation. The coaches will win: they will be better trained and therefore more knowledgeable in sports technique, health fitness principles and injury prevention, and so they will enjoy coaching more. Parents will win: they will know that their children are being instructed by qualified personnel. And of course, the biggest winners will be the kids: they will be better trained, less likely to be injured and more qualified to participate in sports and health fitness activities throughout life.

The Sports Medicine Bible for Young Athletes (SourceBooks, 2002) by Dr. Lyle Micheli is a book filled with important information about how to make a young athlete's sports experience as safe and successful as possible. Visit www.lylemichelimd.com.

This fact sheet was created by Dr. Lyle Micheli and the faculty of the Division of Sports Medicine at Children's Hospital Boston.