

# The Center keeps Sisters kids safe in sports

By Jim Cornelius  
Editor in Chief

High school athletics can be one of the most beneficial aspects of a student's education — but injury can cloud the experience. In recent years as coaches, medical professionals, student-athletes and parents have all grown more aware of the potentially life-altering impact of concussions, they have made moves to improve students' safety.

Last Friday, The Center Foundation hosted its second annual Blue Jean Ball fundraiser at Tetherow in Bend, raising tens of thousands of dollars to support The Center's program of concussion baseline testing, injury assessment, and the stationing of qualified athletic trainers at Central Oregon's high schools, including Sisters.

The Blue Jean Ball featured a live and silent auction and paddle raise with a Western theme accompanied by the Central Oregon band Dry Canyon Stampede. A cadre of athletes from Sisters High School turned out to support the event.

Through the Center's program, at the beginning of each sport season, athletes are given computerized Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Testing (ImPACT), which establishes a baseline of their normal mental function. In the event of a concussion, research-based protocols guide care and treatment. A defined set of conditions must be met before an athlete can return to the field or court. It is especially critical that an athlete not return to play until he or she has healed, so as to avoid Second Impact Syndrome, which can lead to significant brain injury and impairment. (See <https://www.centerfoundation.org/concussion-management>.)

An Oregon law named Jenna's Law in honor of standout Sisters athlete Jenna Sneva, who suffered severely from multiple concussions, formally legislated against immediate return to play after a concussion. This has reportedly resulted in a marked decrease in the number of students developing Second Impact Syndrome.

"The ultimate goal is for no child to ever have a secondary concussion, because that's when it can become really dangerous and potentially fatal," Sonja Donohue, The Center Foundation's executive director, told *The Nugget*.

The frontline of defense against concussion is

provided by athletic trainers. Stuart Schmidt is the supervisor of the athletic trainers in the Central Oregon schools. He was the trainer at Sisters High School from 2008 to 2010.

Schmidt noted that, while football obviously carries the highest degree of concussion risk, an athlete can take an elbow on the basketball court or have a collision or hit the turf hard on the soccer pitch. A wrestler could be concussed in a fall or a volleyball player slammed on the hardwood.

Trainers are on hand to assess the situation and act as needed. If a player goes down and doesn't get up, or gets up wobbly, if they're not quite right on the sideline, the trainer has the background, training and experience to make an evaluation — and to act.

"They'll do a full evaluation to determine if they have a concussion," Schmidt explained.

If there's any suspicion that there's a concussion, the trainer will pull the athlete from the game for further testing. The trainer — not a coach or the player — makes the call.

"The athletic trainer has the autonomy to make the call



PHOTO BY JIM CORNELIUS

Athletic trainer Alex Walker has built a strong relationship with student athletes at Sisters High School. Several Outlaws turned out for The Center Foundation's fundraiser to support concussion testing programs in schools.

whether the person should be removed and cannot continue playing," Schmidt said

Alex Walker is in her fourth year as the Outlaws' athletic trainer. She works at The Center in the mornings putting casts on arms and legs, then she heads out to Sisters for each afternoon's practices and contests.

Four years of five-days-a-week presence makes Walker an integral part of the athletes' support at Sisters High School.

"You really get to know the kids," Walker told *The*

See **CONCUSSIONS** on page 26

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