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Trainers are key in recovery process

Athletic trainers play a major role in the rehabilitation process for injured athletes

By Deena Manning
Freelance Sports Reporter

Pain is a major barrier that keeps athletes from playing, but with the help of athletic trainers athletes can get beyond that barrier.

"You want more than anything to be out there," said Oregon softball team member Jennifer Apfelbaum said. "As long as you're not dead, you should be out on the field or court. You just want to be out there no matter what."

An athlete's worst nightmare is being injured. It is the one thing in sports that players fear the most. Athletes can be at the pinnacle of their career one minute, and the next minute could spell disaster.

All athletes know the risks involved with participating, but they also know they are going to take every preventative measure possible to stay free of injury.

However, injuries happen — like it or not.

After an athlete suffers an injury, they must undergo the on-going process of treatment. This can take days, weeks, months or even years in some cases. It is often the mental anguish over not being able to give 100 percent that frustrates players the most.

And playing through the pain is often an issue in itself.

"We don't object with athletes playing with a certain amount of pain," said Oregon assistant athletic trainer Moira Doyle. "The main issue of an athlete playing with an injury is if playing with that injury will

increase the duration of that injury or the severity of it."

The role of athletic trainers is to not only make sure the injury will not cause long-term problems, but also to make sure the athlete understands all the risks involved and is willing to accept them.

However, the glory and accomplishments that go with performing at the Pacific-10 Conference level are not without blemishes. There are many instances in an athlete's career that limit him or her from performing up to expectations. Such factors could be injuries, illness or fatigue. These are situations that force an athlete to turn for help.

Where do these athletes turn?

They turn to the doctors and trainers in the University treatment centers. Every trainer in the system treats about 15 to 20 athletes per day, excluding taping ankles, knees or other nagging areas for injury prevention.

In an average day, there could be as many as 125 athletes receiving treatment at the McArthur Court Treatment Center and the Casanova Center.

"Every trainer has their own team assignments," Doyle said. "We are trained to recognize and record the signs and symptoms of an injury and then make an initial assessment. Depending on the injury, we may refer them to a physician or begin appropriate treatment for that injury."

The University staff houses six full-time athletic trainers, nine part-time graduate assistant athletic trainers, two undergraduate student athletic trainers, two orthopedic surgeons, one part-time team physician and an extended group of medical specialists.

Not only is the personnel well-trained, but the equipment is up-to-date as well, Doyle said. All of these factors aid in keeping the athletes performing at their peak.

After athletes are injured, they go through the step-by-step process of rehabilitation. Not only are they putting in their time on the field or court, but they are also subjected to the grueling process of treatment.

Putting in all of those hours can be frustrating, especially if the injury still prevents the athlete from playing. Often an athlete chooses to play through the pain to help his or her team.

Even though an athlete possesses the determination and strength to play through an injury, the athletic trainer usually has the last say in the matter.

"We distinguish between the types of pain to help them," Doyle said. "Some pain is okay, and other types of pain are signals that they are not ready."

College athletes have a rough lifestyle, she said, because they are constantly juggling their time between both school and practice. Not only do athletes endure the physical challenges of practicing endless hours, but they are also forced to cope with the on-going stress of school.

An injury is the last thing an athlete wants to deal with. Having athletic trainers and doctors available makes life that much easier for the typical athlete.

"The terms to understanding our [athletic trainers'] role is that we work closely with the physicians and act as a liaison between coaches, players and the outside world," Doyle said.

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