



Athletic Liability Series – Part 3 of 3

CONDITIONING ATHLETES: ARE YOU READY FOR THE HEAT?

**By: William D. Berard III, Esq., and Mary Jo McGrath, Esq.
McGrath Training Systems**

“Are you ready?” This simple question of good coaching is also a fundamental of responsible risk management. Coaches have the important duty of ensuring that their athletes are properly conditioned.

As school doors open around the country for the start of a new academic year, we are also launching another season of fall sports practice and competition for student athletes. What makes this time of year so challenging for coaches is that it is also the hottest time of year throughout most of the United States. Coaches are forced to find the delicate balance between properly conditioning athletes for the upcoming season and being mindful of the often severe weather conditions. Unfortunately, this balance is not always met, and we read about athletes suffering from dehydration, heat stroke, and even death.

To avoid this, it is vital that a coach truly knows his or her athletes and understands and appreciates the strengths and limitations of each. A preseason physical should be completed for each athlete, and the coach should review all physical forms prior to the first practice session. The coach must be aware of any pertinent medical conditions and/or physical disabilities that an athlete may have and find out what limitations the condition may cause. This type of inquiry must be done in a very sensitive manner so as to avoid violating the student’s HIPAA (medical records) privacy rights. Given HIPAA, be sure to also confer with your district legal counsel as to where records from physicals and emergency medical information should be stored and who has access to these records.

In addition, coaches must accommodate any limitations caused by the weather. For example, if the forecast is humid and temperatures in the 80's or 90's, practice should not be held in the middle of the day when it is the hottest. An early morning or evening practice would be more acceptable. Even during these times, hydration is of the utmost importance.

Providing fluids is not always enough however. Coaches must be vigilant and make sure that athletes are actually consuming the fluids. In addition to regular fluid breaks, athletes should be allowed periodic opportunities to get out of the sun (such as sitting under a shady tree) and to remove any protective gear that may be confining, heavy or heat-absorbing.

There is no substitute for acting reasonably and responsibly when conditioning athletes. Here are some helpful conditioning guidelines:

- Never allow a student to participate, not even in practice, without a preseason physical exam.
- Always begin the activity with a warm-up phase.
- Include an appropriate period of conditioning before the start of the season.
- Before practice or conditioning sessions, always ask athletes if they have been ill or experiencing any pain or injury. Make it safe for them to communicate their concerns to you – publicly or privately. Do not allow anyone to be ridiculed for voicing a well being concern.
- Learn the indicators of possible injury, heat exhaustion, asthma, seizures, eating disorders

and mental health concerns, and be alert for these signs and symptoms during conditioning, practice and competition.

- Check the weather daily and have a plan in place for canceling activities and responding to weather-related dangers such as electrical storms and flash floods.
- Keep written records of conditioning routines, lesson plans, athletes' attendance and progress.

Have a great Fall season and minimize the risk of harm and liability for all involved.

Start the 2006-2007 school year prepared!

Prepare your coaches for the fall season...

McGrath Fall Sports Liability: Minimize the Risk Short Course Topics include:

- Identify the greatest risks of harm and liability in fall sports and how to avoid them
- Liability for deliberate indifference toward hazing – don't let it happen to you
- Coaches' duties and responsibilities under the law
- Proper supervision of athletes and volunteers
- Checklists and report forms for facilities, practice sessions and events

For: Principals, athletic directors and coaches of fall sports programs

Prepare your district for Bullying Intervention...

Bullying and Harassment: Fundamentals of Detection, Identification, and Legally Fit Intervention

Covers:

- How to detect and identify incidents and patterns
- How to intervene on the spot in classrooms and nontraditional settings
- How to create, monitor and maintain a safe environment
- How to create legally fit records

For: Teachers, staff, extracurricular activity directors, and administrators.

Click here for a full list of fall [McGrath Short Course](#) offerings.

Don't forget to order your copies of Mary Jo's new book, School Bullying: Tools for Avoiding Harm and Liability (Corwin Press). This volume provides a wealth of information on liability for all types of peer harassment and intimidation, including hazing, and the tools and procedures needed for conducting legally fit investigations. It is now in print and available from McGrath Training Systems. [Order now!](#)

Contact:

info@mcgrathinc.com

800-733-1638

www.mcgrathinc.com