

December 23

Sports Medicine: Give schools the gift of quality medical care

By DR. JAMES GLAZER

Dear Santa,

All I want for Christmas this year is an athletic trainer for each of Maine's high schools. I know it is a lot to ask, but I'll explain why it is so important.

Put simply, for the thousands of Maine teenagers who play high school sports, an athletic trainer is the most essential piece of safety equipment. They're more important than shin guards for soccer athletes, than mouth guards for hockey players, and even more important than helmets for football players.

Ask any athletic director you know, and they will tell you the same thing: A good athletic trainer keeps everyone safe. They are first on the field stabilizing an injured athlete's neck to make sure a frightening blow does not turn into a lifetime in a wheelchair. They are a parent's earliest contact when they bring a concussed daughter home and wonder whether she is safe to go to sleep for the night. And they are the first to step in and intervene when a player is ignoring a real injury in order to get back on the field to help his team out.

Athletic trainers have usually played sports themselves, so they can identify with the needs of athletes. They have studied for their position all through college, learning anatomy, physiology and physical diagnosis. Most have accumulated years of experience on the sideline caring for athletes before they even graduate. While their classmates may be living a more carefree life, athletic training students are working with their teams, learning the skills to care for athletes.

Athletic trainers are some of the most hard-working people in our schools. They open up the training room hours before the athletes hit the field, and they stay long after the teams' equipment has been put away. Most athletic trainers wouldn't know what to do with themselves if they only had one thing going on at a time. Most can easily perform an entire evaluation with one athlete while taping three others, and at the same time keep tabs on the four basketball players rooting around in their desk for a snack.

I've never been around a training room that wasn't a bustling hub of activity. Plenty of athletes come for treatment, but just as many are there to hang out. Athletic trainers, in addition to being great clinicians, usually chose their career because they genuinely care for the kids.

Otherwise, they couldn't work the crazy hours they do. Do you enjoy catching up on chores at home during the weekend? Our athletic trainers are probably spending their weekend on the sideline working a game. Do you like to get home after work and unwind before dinner? That's

the prime time for an athletic trainer to be taping up kids before basketball practice.

I know that school budgets are constantly being squeezed. I understand that Maine's teachers and school administrators are just as deserving of a column about them. I'd like for us to be able to support all of our educational institutions' needs.

But as your school's budget is being debated, think about this: When your son or daughter is at an away game, lying on a strange field in pain, frightened about an injury they just sustained, who do you want out there keeping them safe? In that situation, and in a thousand others all over Maine, there's no substitute for an athletic trainer.

Dr. James Glazer is a sports medicine physician for Coastal Orthopedics and Sports Medicine in Freeport. He serves as a consultant for the Portland Pirates and the U.S. Ski Team.

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