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Athletics trainers: Don't use exercise as punishment

By Erin Egan, USA TODAY

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Recommend 2

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The National Athletic Trainers' Association, in an effort to prevent deaths of college athletes, wants football programs to stop using exercise as punishment and to create individualized training programs for players.

NATA, which announced these recommendations and others Wednesday at its annual convention in St. Louis, says that exertional heat stroke, complications stemming from sickle cell trait and cardiac conditions were the three leading causes of death during football training sessions in the last 12 years.

Of 21 total NCAA football deaths in that time, 75% were members of Division I programs and 11 of them occurred during day one or day two workouts.

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Although most of the deaths have occurred in football, Dr. Douglas Casa, Chief Operating Officer at the Korey Stringer Institute at the [University of Connecticut](#), said he hopes the recommendations become official regulations for all collegiate athletics programs.

"These deaths have gotten a little out of hand and we wanted some level of control," Casa, who spearheaded the study and planned the statement, said in an interview with USA TODAY Sports. "The big thing about this announcement is this is the first time any group or organization has come out and recommended how to make conditioning sessions safer, and that's what's really unique about this."

Included in the four pages of recommendations is the suggestion that training programs should be individualized to suit the needs of each athlete. Casa added that creating

separate programs for each athlete is unrealistic, but injuries and freshman status should be taken into consideration.

"We don't expect every single person to have their own program, but we do expect the athletic trainers to recognize specific athletic needs," Casa said. "If you have 10 freshmen and 40 upperclassmen, or someone coming off an injury, that group should have a different work out schedule. Coaches and athletic trainers should cater to those particular needs."

The statement consistently emphasized cooperative work between medical staff and strength and conditioning coaches, as the latter often do not have medical degrees. NATA hones the

Tom Olmscheid, AP

Officials at the Korey Stringer Institute, named for the former NFL player who died from complication of heat stroke, want to change summer workouts in college football.

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and conditioning coaches, as the latter often do not have medical degrees. With hopes the NCAA will soon require that each strength and conditioning coach have a degree in exercise science, pass a certification exam for credentials and maintain certification in first aid, CPR and the use of a defibrillator.

Dr. Chuck Stiggins, the executive director of the Collegiate Strength and Conditioning Coaches Association, said the near-1,500 members of his association from 947 colleges and universities already meet those suggestions.

NCAA Director of Health and Safety Dave Klossner said the NCAA also already mandates that each strength and conditioning coach be certified in first aid and CPR, but further certification is something his department is looking into.

Like Casa, Stiggins said that harmonious cooperation between athletic trainers and strength and conditioning coaches is necessary for athlete safety.

"It's very, very important that we work synergistically," Stiggins said. "Our areas are separate and distinctive but we have to work together to ensure the safety of the athlete. It's so important that we work together and respect each other."

The NATA announcement also detailed recommendations to not use exercise and conditioning activities as punishment for individual athletes who are late for practice, miss class or got in trouble around campus.

"There usually is no medical staff around and punishments are not scientifically planned out, so it raises a lot of unique dangers," Casa said. "Is it realistic? In a sense I really don't care if it's realistic. We're moving in this direction. Some day it's going to be eliminated."

The CSCCA agreed, adding that coaches should punish athletes by making them sit out of a game or lose a starting position instead of disciplinary conditioning, like running stadium steps or extra wind sprints.

"Conditioning should be there to maximize durability of the athlete, but it should not be used for discipline," Stiggins said. "We have got to change our culture. It happens very slowly, but we have to get away from that punishment mentality. There are better ways to handle that."

The recommendations are aimed at university presidents and the NCAA. Casa added that he hopes those entities implement each suggestion as an official regulation. Stiggins agrees.

"It's kind of like wearing seatbelts. Most people wear their seatbelts now, but it's taken time," Stiggins said. "Everything in this announcement I totally support. This is a culture change and is something that needs to be done. I support 100% all of these changes."

Klossner said a medical committee is reviewing the suggestions and is evaluating ways to support the initiative.

"One specific way the NCAA could adopt this would be requiring our members to ensure that strength and conditioning coaches have national certification," Klossner said. "We're evaluating ways for those recommendations to be legislation."

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