Implementing a Support System for Injured College Athletes

Bringing awareness of the difficulties facing injured athletes to the Rutgers University Athletic Director and other officials

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Summary

The occurrence of injuries among Division I athletes continues to increase due to various factors such as heightened intensity and training, and will continue to increase unless something substantial is done to properly prevent, diagnose, and treat these injuries. Due to the connection of our group and college athletes, we have first-hand experienced various types and degree of injuries that have led to immense amounts of physical and mental distress. Our mission is to create a sense of safety and protection among collegiate athletes when they are faced with an injury so that their short term expectations and long term health are both considered when making important decisions. After speaking to high ranking officials within the Athletic Department, submitting several editorials to relative media sources, and interviewing relevant individuals regarding out issue, we believe that we are well on our way to improving the conditions in which injured student athletes have to survive in.

Video Link

Part 1: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tW_6oL6gR8,
Part 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9iYx-7j3jA,
Part 3: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jORurUdi5dk
Part 4: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bv6-Mz0J_kU
The Issue: Injured Athletes

Introduction (KA)
While participating in Division I athletics for four years, each of our group members has gone through different injuries, has had different experiences dealing with the medical side of athletics, and many of which has resulted in being prohibited from participating or being pushed through injuries in order to be able to compete on the field. As a group we have decided to pick apart the pieces of Division I sports to find some answers to questions that have never been answered, in order to help protect student athletes in the future. This topic is relevant to each group member because of significant injuries that have hindered aspects of our lives like the amount of playing time, personal morale, and our everyday mobility. Whether the injury is serious or not, student athletes face these problems day to day and receive a ton of pressure to make decisions immediately that often causes an extreme amount of uncertainty and stress. Usually when you are sick or injured and not in a position where you have to perform for a team or a coach, you can have faith in your doctors and the people around you that influence your everyday life. But a significant difference in Division I athletics is that you can’t always trust the doctors or trainers or even coaches for that matter because all are not necessarily looking out for your future; in many instances they are pushing for a speedy recovery to resolve their immediate problem of not having who they want able to compete on the playing field.

There are pressures that the doctors face the coaching staff to get the athlete on the field as much as possible. So how are these doctors chosen? Are there credentials important? Or does the doctor that is going to provide the most immediate care for the athletes going to get the job? These are some of the questions that we are going to be investigating in order for the best possible outcome to be established. The doctors are also facing pressures to provide the “proper treatment” for the athletes. Doctors could genuinely care for the student players on the field at all times. In some cases a hurt player is better than a player of the bench to a coach due to their talent not health. Other times coaches aren’t pressured as much which can also project positive involvement in student athlete’s injury treatment and rehabilitation process. As you can see, the variables talked about provide for a detrimental conclusion on the student athletes life. Being injured is something that most athletes have to go through at some time or another and it helps when you have positive people around you to help you make important decisions regarding your immediate and future situations. In the end you need to look out for your life without the sport first because the people that you’re surrounded by may not be doing so.

Division I athletics can be a stepping stone for a career in sports. There are extremely athletic football, basketball and even baseball players that can make a life and a living out of what they do on the field or court. These types of players and their healthcare are a high priority for universities. The type of player that goes on to have a carrier in sports typically has to face several injuries and make important decisions about their future in athletics. These types of players take in all considerations about their future for the sport. What about the player that has no future after they graduate? Are there different standards that coincide with the “priority” of the player? When a student athlete decides that he or she wants to play sports at a Division I college or university they are immediately taking on a life filled with honor, hard work, and structure. Not many student athletes are thinking about what kind of protection they have if they are injured until they are actually injured. There are plenty of pressures that still exist in the
athlete that is not going to be able to go onto a professional league after he or she graduates. In this case we think that there needs to be a sense of protection for a healthy and pain free life after sports. As of right now student athletes that are too injured to finish their seasons are put aside in order to focus more on active student athletes and their success on the field. This kind of information is what we are trying to introduce to student athletes that are looking to make the commitment of Division I athletics. Much current standing that the NCAA regulates on injured student athletes concern the amount of insurance coverage that is available. We hope to bring knowledge to student athletes about these regulations and to point out where the NCAA has missed significant topics regarding the student-athletes’ injuries. By providing education and awareness among student athletes, coaches, and sports medicine departments we aim to encourage open communication and protection from the student athlete to fall into pressures that they are not comfortable with. Although the NCAA puts ample emphasis on the insurance coverage that is offered in different situations involving student-athletes, nothing is mentioned along the lines of protecting the student-athletes from ignoring an injury, going back to competition too early, or covering up an injury in order to appease pressures put on them by coaches, teammates, and staff.

Relevance & Position of the Sports Medicine Staff (BD)

Although accidents and injuries occur within all people, athletes are more prone and at risk for them. As current members of the women’s lacrosse team here at Rutgers, injury has been a prevalent in each and every one of our careers. Athletes are on a continuous attempt to strive toward perfection on a daily basis, which most often puts their bodies at risk for injuries more frequently than the average person. Rutgers athletes compete at the highest level of talent in Division I, which puts extreme pressures on their bodies to train and perform on a daily basis. No matter what level of athletics you compete at, you are never exempt from encountering injuries. Millions of athletically related injuries occur each year, many of which happen at the Division I level due to the high amount of competition and pressures put on them to represent their team, coach, and school.

Injuries come with the territory of being an athlete. As members of a Division I collegiate team if you have not suffered from the injury you have witnessed and experienced the pressures along with recovering to full performance. Injuries in athletes on a lacrosse team most often are experienced due to over training and physical fatigue. With each and every day the team goes through two to three hours of practice including high endurance training and physical contact often followed by weight training for an hour. Although high intensity training is important in order to compete at the highest level it also puts a major stress on athletes to push them toward injury.

When injuries occur at a high rate within teams, individual athletes experience a high amount of stress and fear which leads to an increased risk of injury. Psychological factors play a major role in performance hindering the confidence to play without sustaining an injury. Personally playing scared whether it is of injury or not succeeding, players often don’t play to there highest potential or often hesitate to perform which puts the athlete at high risk of sport and exercise related injuries. The physical and psychological factors of being an athlete go hand in hand with the occurrence of injuries and the pressures to perform.
With injuries comes a lot of time spent diagnosing the problem, experiencing the pain of the injury and the struggle to rehab the injury back to full performance. The physical part of dealing with an injury is also affected highly by the psychological emotions that come with not playing and or playing through pain. Within our group alone it is safe to say that each member has been through procedures including MRI’s, x-rays, bone scans, surgeries and or rehab within their career of lacrosse. Sports related injuries have been a part of our everyday lives.

Personally during my lacrosse career I have experienced over 12 procedures in an effort to try to alleviate the pain and discomfort in my body. In the past two years I have received 3 surgeries on the same knee dealing with ACL reconstruction, meniscus repair and most recently the removal of my meniscus completely. With the surgeries comes consistent rehabilitation. In diagnosing these types of problems came numerous MRI’s, injections physical and emotional pain. Although at some point I will be able to play again, it will be with the support of a brace and anticipated lifelong knee problems.

The importance of this issue has affected another group member who also is part of a Division I team. In this situation persistent injuries and ineffective surgeries have left her with minimal options as far as participation and a grim outlook on her future joint health. Unfortunately some injuries can occur and diminish a player’s career for a lifetime, which was the case with one of our group members. This type of injury also resulted in three surgeries that still didn’t allow her to play and that type of emotional stress is difficult to cope with each and every time. Not only can injuries end a career, but also it poses a struggle for the person to exercise, partake in their competitive personality, and do simple tasks in the future with children or in particular occupations.

When dealing with the maintenance of athletes on a daily basis the experience of athletic trainers and a medical staff is important. Due to the fact that athletes suffer various types of negative occurrences, multiple professionals are involved to benefit the student athlete’s recovery. Athletic trainers and the sports medicine staff work hand in hand by providing the highest quality of health care to the student athletes within their network. Although both the trainers and physicians provide separate care, the health and safety of the athlete is the main priority.

In developing and maintaining a sports medicine staff that can provide the support and care to athletes it includes the roles of athletic trainers, physicians and a conditioning staff. Here at Rutgers each part of the medicine staff is held to the standard of providing year round care to the university’s student athletes. The staff is responsible for all injuries, illnesses, rehabilitation and other personal issues affecting an athlete’s physical or mental status. The priority of the sports medicine staff is ultimately the care and rehabilitation of the athlete. Although the best possible solution is prioritizing the health of the student athlete, it can often result in the negative push for short-term recovery rather than lifelong comfort and relief.

Most often the sports medicine staff also is influenced by direct communication from the players’ coaches. Coaches are held to the standard of the success of the team and often time’s valuable players become vulnerable to major injuries. These injuries’ repair and recovery can sometimes be put off in order to allow the athlete to continue to play. This type of pressure can often come from the athlete as well. The pressures that come with the medicine staff is a constant battle
between the athlete, the coach and what is best for both the athlete long term and the teams ultimate success.

When a student athlete begins to experience an injury, the process of choosing a doctor to provide care to the athlete is decided among the severity and classification of the injury. If a student athlete is suffering from any sort of orthopedic emergency the doctor that accompanies that athlete to recovery is suggested by the medical staff on campus and ultimately chosen by the athlete according to their preference. Athletes accompanied by athletic trainers will make the decision on choosing the appropriate doctor for them based on how comfortable they feel with the doctor’s decisions and confidence within their practice. The process of choosing an appropriate doctor often comes with getting different opinions from a variety of doctors and what type of procedures they feel necessary to repair the problem. This process of choosing a doctor is related to an injury’s effects including the long term recovery, rehab and surgical repairs.

Coaching Involvement & Outside Pressures (MM)
When it comes to injuries in Division I college athletes, there are many different coaches and coaching styles. Whether a coach is open to discussion on injuries or potential injuries or act as if they never happen, student athletes are definitely influenced directly by their coaches. There are constructive coaching involvements and non-constructive coaching involvements in the prevention and rehabilitation of injuries throughout all college sports. In this section I am going to explain the positive and negative coaching participation before an athlete is injured, as well as the different involvement of coaches after an athlete is hurt.

Injuries are unavoidable in most cases, but when a team is led by a coach who negatively handles and does nothing to prevent injuries, the athletes are more mentally and physically tested. Coaches who give the attitude of “suck it up” to their team sends the message that injuries are not important and therefore do not need to be reported or treated. These athletes are less likely to report when they have an ailment or a “tweak” in their muscles that usually lead to more serious injuries when not given rest. This problem is more evident in athletes who have starting positions or are the star players. For fear of losing their spot and being replaced, athletes will keep quiet and play on their injuries, making the ailment worse, and the athlete usually play worse as well. Also, athletes with a negative injury coach tend to under report injuries that are especially less obvious. A broken leg is something a coach cannot ignore exists, but shin splints, which lead to bone fractures, is not seen on the exterior of the body. Concussions, perhaps the most dangerous under reported injury, fall into this category as well. A coach can have the influence of the player to just “suck it up” when they get knocked in the head, because they are needed on the field, without making sure the athlete is checked for brain damage or to make sure they have proper head protection after getting hit.

Coaches with a constructive outlook on injuries and injury prevention set up communication between the athletes, medical staff, and coaching staff. Athletes do not hesitate to report when they are injured; take the amount of rest needed, and return when they or the medical staff is say it is time to return. A coach who positively works hard to prevent injuries, such as preaching stretching, healthy diets, and hydration tends to deal with less major injuries on their team anyway.
There are also positive and negative influences of coaches on athletes for the time after the injury has occurred. Initially, a coach with a negative approach to injuries tends to downplay the injury and expect a quick return for all athletes and all injuries. They put pressure on the medical staff to clear a player faster, or push their rehabilitation quickly in order to have the athlete return to the field, court, or pool. These coaches have trouble realizing that not only is there many different types of injuries; every player’s body is different. Recovery for one athlete can take a lot longer for another. Athletes are influenced by pushy coaches to speed up recovery and sometimes return to a full-impact game without being fully healed. This can be very dangerous for the athlete’s health, all because of a coach’s negative influence.

On the other hand, there are those positive coaches who support athletes after an injury. These coaches give the student athlete lots of support and motivation, while not pressuring them to return to the sport until they are healthy and comfortable. The medical staff can do their job fully without being influenced to go against their better judgment of returning a player too quickly. These coaches have a team where they do not hesitate to report their injuries, concussions, and muscle tweaks and is then treated right away and heals more efficiently, rather than not reporting the injury and being pressured to play through it.

In Division I and in any sport, you can get a coach who views and treats injuries differently. There are coaches who are proactive with fighting off injuries before they happen, and there are coaches who mention nothing about accepting or supporting the chance an injury can happen. After injuries occur, there are positive coaches who make an athlete feel comfortable by not pressuring them when to return. These coaches know that every athlete is different and there can never be a solid set date of when to expect a player back. There are also negative coaches who influence the medical staff and force the athlete to speed up recovery just to return to the team as soon as possible, putting their health at more of a risk. Student athletes deal with a lot of pressure to steer away from reporting injuries that will compromise their position on the field, their standings with coaches and their image as an athlete. The NCAA has no rules and regulations that protect an athlete from these pressures after an injury has occurred.

Besides coming from a coach, as mentioned above, there are a few more types of specific pressures a student athlete battles with when dealing with injuries. First there is the individual pressure an athlete puts on himself or herself. Secondly the strain a family puts on a student athlete. Next I will emphasize the team pressures involved when a player is injured. Throughout explaining these strains, I am going to compare the pressures of regular student athletes who only play in college and end after college graduation to a player who is in a sport that has the potential to continue playing professionally and see how they differ.

Athletes who play in the Division I level are not just handed a letter of intent during the recruitment process or a hefty scholarship for nothing. They are typically disciplined, hard-working, determined individuals who have dedicated a lot of blood, sweat, and tears to play at a high level. That being said these are people who will work hard to get a position on the field, and tend to not let something like a “small” injury take away from how hard they have worked to secure a spot. In a sport where there is no professional league after college, these athletes have four years left of their favorite sport and do not have time to sit out or slow down due to injuries
that seem minor to them. Individually they set their expectations of themselves high and have the drive to reach those expectations without excuses, including injuries.

In a sport where there is potential for a professional career, athletes have the opportunity to show the world their hard work and success. In the world of professional sports in America there is fortune, popularity, and fame that come with a position in professional sports. A player who is being looked at to be picked up by a professional team knows the pros do not want to spend millions of dollars on an injured player, or one that will come with future injuries. This causes student athletes to avoid reporting injuries in fear it will compromise future professional offers. Sometimes it is an athlete’s parents who have molded the player they are today. In a sport that does not have professional leagues it is not uncommon for family to still be the motivating factor in that student athletes’ playing career.

The pressure from the family of a player who is done after college sometimes doesn’t compare to the push a player gets from family when they have the opportunity to go professionally. In some instances, a family relies on their athletic relative to “make it big” in the pros and support them with money. An athlete who has a family depending on them to continue on professionally and support their loved ones will definitely think twice before slowing down for an injury. They do not see sitting out and resting an injury as a healthy or proactive choice, and their family puts a lot of stress on them to keep going even if injured. They do not see resting an injury as smart and productive in the end, they see it as conflicting with supporting their family down the road.

Team pressures can be very influential on injury reporting ignoring or returning too early. In team sports such as football, lacrosse, baseball and softball, there are usually ten or more position to be filled on the field at one time. When someone is an asset to the team’s success, they will feel pressure from their teammates to return back quickly from an injury or not report one at all. The message an athlete gets is that the team needs them and they would be letting the team down if they don’t remain in their position. Players want to be looked at as leaders, as someone who is tough enough to play through pain and still perform. Another example of team stress put on athlete is when there is a team with a star athlete or most valuable player. This player carries the team and is a lot of the reason for their success. Kevin Saum, an interviewee who described his serious concussion situation, confirmed that one of the reasons he pushed through his symptoms was because of the pressure he felt to lead and perform in order to not let any teammates down and fulfill their expectations of him. Kevin Saum found out the hard way that this isn’t always the best example to set for younger teammates and fellow athletes. This athlete will hesitate to sit out or properly deal with his or her injuries correctly in fear that when they leave the team will do poorly and they will be the sole reason for losing.

The NCAA has rules and regulations found on their website that lay down safety guidelines on specific sports before an injury has occurred, in order to prevent them in the future. The NCAA does not, however, support athletes after an injury and look out for their safe return. Players receive pressure from coaches, themselves, family and teammates and expect 100% out of them all of the time. Injuries are ignored and not treated properly because there are no rules for reporting an injury or regulations for when that person is officially ready to play, not when a coach or influenced medical staff says they are cleared.
The pressures a student athlete deals with are strenuous enough on their mental and physical health in their four years of college, they do not need heavy unhealthy influences to play through an injury or prematurely return from healing one. The NCAA needs to protect these student athletes with official guidelines and regulations in order to defend them and keep them healthy.

Current NCAA Standings & Our Mission Plan (EG)
The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) issues an annual manual and list of guidelines that examines the rules and restrictions that all NCAA members are expected to follow. The NCAA's mission is to protect and enhance collegiate athletics and while promoting proper character within sports for all members. The organization regulates all members and events involved in collegiate athletics, including relevant issues such as eligibility standards, playing rules, student-athlete academic affairs, and recruiting policies. The NCAA also focuses on enhancing the well-being of each student-athlete within the NCAA, which includes the physical and mental wellness of each student-athlete. In the NCAA Division I Manual (2011), it goes into detail about each of the standards that institutions, coaches, doctors, student-athletes, and even fans are held to and also the consequences people face if found guilty of breaking these standards. One of main issues surrounding injuries among student-athletes is the different types of insurance coverage institutions can and are obligated to offer their athletes. Eligibility and Financial Aid policies are also among the most mentioned topics relating to what happens when a student athlete becomes injured. Many times a student is presented with the option to ‘redshirt’, sit out a year due to injury or inexperience in order to compete in a fifth year, which preserves the player for an extra year but also forces them to sit out an entire season of play. An example of this tough, undefined decision-making process that goes into determining whether or not to redshirt is the interview with current Rutgers athlete, Annie McGinley. Due to the lack of clear communication and conflicts of interests that coaches, doctors, and trainers had regarding Annie’s knee injury, she was left to decide midseason whether or not she would abandon her junior season this year in order to compete an extra year. Some of the factors that went into her decision making process was the amount of coverage and support that would be given to her for five, instead of four, full years. It is imperative for an athlete to receive elite physical and mental care, which is often not covered fully by their personal insurance and is therefore reliant on the athletic insurance coverage provided by the institutions. The third major area covered related to this topic is the responsibilities of institutions to cover student-athletes with life changing injuries or illnesses even after their eligibility expires. An interview with Kelly Nangle, a former two-sport Division I athlete, is a prime example of how competing in collegiate athletics has left her with expensive, bothersome, and inconvenient pain, surgeries, and hours of physical therapy. Kelly Nangle was faced with shoulder, foot, and knee problems due to her participation in collegiate athletics, which would majorly impact her current and future health as well as inflicted unplanned for costs surrounding the injuries and treatments. In the 2010-2011 NCAA Division I Manual, it goes into detail about the regulations surrounding when, how, and who can be covered by the athletic department’s insurance policy, the financial regulations affecting a

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"2010-2011 Division I Manual." National Collegiate Athletic Association
[Indianapolis] 1 July 2010: 1-444. :
student with a catastrophic injury, and the obligation to continue to coverage life-long treatments due to participating in collegiate athletics.

A major issue that the NCAA currently covers in their handbook goes into detail regarding the various methods, coverage, and types of insurance they are allowed to provide their student-athletes. Section 3.2.4.8 Certification of Insurance Coverage headlines the major topic of insurance for involved student-athletes that may encounter any athletically related injuries during their years of eligibility. The term athletically related injuries can be defined as any injury that comes as a blatant result of playing in a sponsored event by a university. This includes off-season conditioning, practices, strength sessions, off-season competition, traveling, and of course games/matches during the regular season. Athletes who are injured under these circumstances are taken care of by the school’s insurance policy and their personal insurance plan, if applicable, will be listed as their secondary provider. There are two types of unique insurance programs, the Catastrophic Insurance Program and the Exceptional Student-Athlete Disability Insurance program. Both programs promise to cover athletes when unexpected injuries and/or illnesses arise and when these occurrences last for a lifetime. The Catastrophic Insurance Program covers student-athletes who encounter an injury that is very severe and it promises a $75,000 deductible for those athletes faced with this terrible situation. This is a major benefit to dangerous sports with a lot of contact and risk of injury, such as football, hockey, men’s lacrosse, and rugby. Contact sports often result in a number of serious head, neck and back injuries that are treated with extreme caution and care. These sports are also the main culprit for your more common serious injuries such as torn ligaments, fractures, or broken bones. The increase of talent and competitive spirit also increases the risk of injury when participating in contact sports. Unfortunately, unexpected and unfathomable injuries do occur and when it does have to happen, it is necessary to have such a policy in place to financially take care of the injured student-athletes. In most cases, an injury falling under the catastrophic injury category will be career-ending and life altering change. By having this sense of assurance and security it will put the injured person at ease about financial hassles related to their injury. The Catastrophic Insurance Program is used under rare circumstances, but it has been in good use with our fellow student-athlete Eric LeGrand. Eric’s terrible neck injury left him not only physically disabled, but financially strapped to pay for his extensive surgeries, treatments, hospital stays and medicine. Although the Catastrophic Insurance Program seems like it is rarely used, when a friend benefits from the program, it makes the appreciation for such a program much higher than before.

The Exceptional Student-Athlete Disability Insurance is a program dedicated to insuring highly promising athletes in football, men’s and women’s basketball, baseball, and men’s ice hockey. Once an athlete is approved for the program, they are able to protect themselves against future financial loss due to a career-ending injury/sickness during their years of eligibility. The reason why the coverage is limited to the previously mentioned sports is because those are the sports with a high financially-based future in a professional league. It is important for athletes to have this type of security when competing for a professional career because if and when an injury happens that causes an athlete to relinquish playing that sport, they are still given a certain amount of financial security. Although these two programs, the Catastrophic Insurance Program and the Exceptional Student-Athlete Disability Insurance Program, both aim to protect the financial needs and demands that injured/ill student-athletes may face during their collegiate career, no standards are made to keep injured athletes away from any pressures or consequences
that may cause further physical harm. By educating and informing athletes on proper ways to prevent and treat injuries, athletes would have more knowledge about staying away from potential hazards that may jeopardize their professional sports career.

Financial Aid and scholarship grants become a major issue when an athlete faces an injury that compromises their ability and/or playing time. In the NCAA Manual, it defines an injury that is beyond one’s control as an unavoidable incident. These circumstances force a student-athlete to give up participation opportunities based on their extenuating circumstances. This includes both life-threatening and sport debilitating injuries. An option that a student-athlete is offered is to complete a Medical Hardship Waiver, which states the nature of the injury in which they are no longer able to participate in their sport. It does not have to be a direct result of participation in a sport, but it must be properly documented by the acting sports medicine doctor within the athletic department. Examples of an indirect injury/illness that prohibits participating in sport are blood disease that requires blood thinners, unknown heart conditions, and many other health problems that have gone undetected until reaching the college athletics level. The benefit of the Medical Hardship Waiver is that it allows the student to keep that year of eligibility, which often times results in the athlete taking as a fifth year. Another major asset that the NCAA Manual offers its student-athletes is that it prohibits a university to reduce or cancel a scholarship during the athlete’s contractual term due to an injury or illness. For example, Rutgers student-athlete, Annie McGinley, kept her scholarship the year she was hurt and unable to play based on the NCAA standard that prohibits taking any financial money away from an injured athlete the year the injury occurs. Yet, on the other hand the institution is allowed to take away any financial aid that is offered at the end of the contract because of an injury to the athlete. This causes a lot of student to reassess their place in college. Many athletes attend college depending on the amount of financial assistance they are granted based on their athletic talent. When an athlete is suddenly injured and the following year not back to full potential, their scholarship amount often times drops and leaves them in a tough situation. Although it is reassuring that the NCAA regulates the financial aid that a student-athlete receives regardless of an injury in that current year, it is disheartening that they do not have any protection for future years of eligibility when a student-athlete is faced with an unavoidable, unpreventable injury during their years of eligibility. One of our goals is to convert the standard of keeping the amount of financial assistance from the year the athlete is injured into keeping the amount of aid consistent until the student-athlete has completed his/her years of eligibility and/or through graduation.

The third topic that is covered in the NCAA relating to injured student-athletes covers the long-term coverage of injuries that occur while participating in collegiate athletics. Universities are allowed to pay for future medical expenses for a previous student-athlete. These instances include dismemberment, permanent injuries/illnesses as a result of participation. This gives student-athletes the reassurance that they will be covered in the event that a life-changing injury takes place. Another positive attribute that the NCAA has towards improving the wellbeing of severely injured student-athletes is called the Committee of Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports. The fact that the NCAA created and supports this group explains that they see this area as one of importance and concern. The importance of assembling a group of people whose role is specifically to look out for the safety and well-being of student-athletes is to
maintain the mental and physical health of all student-athletes beyond collegiate athletics and into the real world. The Committee of Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports do this through research, education, statistical tracking, drug testing, and developing up to date legislation. One of their duties is to form a national injury surveillance program dedicated to track injuries specific to certain sports and to create methods to prevent these injuries. This is the area that shows the most promise of adding a supplementary injury protection clause. It demonstrates that the NCAA recognizes and cares about the support of injured athletes enough to create a research group; this is where we would like to propose our ideas. By contacting and developing a relationship with the members of this committee, we are hoping to get our message into the hands of the NCAA. This leads in to our mission, to add in a section to the NCAA manual that gives student-athletes a sense of security when dealing with a constant or chronic injury. Although the NCAA puts ample emphasis on the insurance coverage, additional eligibility years, and semi-scholarship protection, nothing is specifically mentioned along the lines of protecting the student-athletes from ignoring an injury, going back to competition too early, or covering up an injury in order to appease pressures put on them by coaches, teammates, and staff.

Our mission is to research, introduce, implement, and spread the knowledge and support the NCAA has for student athletes with devastating and debilitating injuries. Not only are we aiming to increase financial support and solidify existing scholarship money, we are hoping to add a clause to give injured athletes new alternatives in dealing with their tough circumstances. After speaking with several student athletes, coaches, and trainers, we have concluded that the best way to prevent injuries is through awareness and education. We aim to do both of those things by making the importance of those two factors known to the NCAA and to athletic directors across the country. Our first goal is to create a detailed proposal to send out to top NCAA officials in specific departments in order to contact the most relevant people who can help us achieve our goals. This proposal must include all details and future plans that we wish to implement, in order to answer any questions or concerns the NCAA may have before they are done reading it. Our proposal must be sent to the people within the NCAA that hold the power to add and/or adjust the standards they produce each year to all of their members. We will also send a copy of the final proposal to the Committee of Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects of Sports in order for them to see our reasoning behind this important and relevant topic. Then, after sending our proposal, our short-term goal is to increase the knowledge of our topic by presenting it to Rutgers Athletic Department high officials, coaches, trainers, doctors, and fellow student-athletes. The video of interviews and information that we have compiled is an excellent introduction to the problem, cases, and possible solutions that we wish to speak about. The video puts faces to the statistics and makes the information more personable when hearing from fellow student-athletes and Rutgers employees. In order to bolster our presentation we must be open to comments and suggestions from our peers, which in the end will broaden our spectrum and audience. As a group, we have harnessed our personal experiences and concerns regarding injuries and how they are, or aren’t, dealt with at the collegiate level. We plan to organize,
analyze, and create a presentation that will initiate the process of adding a protection clause to the NCAA Manual that is distributed and imposed to all members of the NCAA.

Our research model dives into the history and evolution of NCAA standards over the years. The amount of injuries within competitive sports has increased due to the proportional increase in the level of play and competition at each level. It is evident that the NCAA has realized this and has added standards to somewhat address many of the issues, but none completely protect the rights that are often denied to student-athletes that experience serious injuries. Our document must include specific research and information that is pertinent to our issue in order to show the significance of our mission. By explaining the personal connection our group has had with injuries in collegiate sports and by introducing the perceived need of this injury protective bylaw it will increase the attention and compassion of those who control whether it becomes permanent. The administrators that we are contacting are within the NCAA regulations department and the Committee of Competitive Safeguards and Medical Aspects within the NCAA. By expressing out personal statements and testimonies as well as concrete research, we feel that those people who we reach out to will be inclined to listen to our meaningful argument.

While we are still student-athletes at Rutgers University, it is our mission to spread our thoughts and knowledge on our topic to fellow student-athletes and members within the Rutgers Athletic Department. Instances such as the recent catastrophic spinal cord injury to Eric LeGrand have spiked the amount of attention and sympathy that is given to critically injured athletes. It has opened the eyes of the risk and reality of playing at such a competitive level. We aim to further the amount of new attention being played on injured student-athletes by involving top officials within the Athletic Department to make a change here at Rutgers. The video compilation of personal testimonies and stories, especially with the life threatening injury Kevin Saum describes, will heighten the amount of attention given to our proposal because it has the potential to deal with life and death situations. We feel that it is owed to us and every other student-athlete in the NCAA to receive a cushion of comfort when they are injured and cannot compete. An internal system of education, assistance, and support needs to exist, here at Rutgers, in order to aid injured players through the grueling journey of recovery. We feel that this can have an impact at the local level, here within the Rutgers Athletic Department, and through our success we can eventually spread our success to a grander stage, the entire NCAA.

Conclusion (KA)
Our point in the end is to make a change that protects and ensures the safety of the current and past college student-athletes. This involves research, and to introduce, and successfully add a new section to the NCAA manual that is distributed every year to protect student athletes from devastating pressures and schedules they may face after encountering an injury. This proposal may have to be entered under the 21.2.2 competitive safeguards and medical aspects of sports portion of the manual. We hope that by adding this proposal into the NCAA manual we will be bringing knowledge to the student athletes that are injured and are going to have to make decisions that may or may not influence the rest of their life. After our proposal is either accepted or declined we plan on spreading the news of our findings to relevant people such as, student athletes, coaches, sports medicine departments and athletic directors. We hope that individual schools choose to implement and injury protection policy to give student athletes the peace of mind that they lack without such support.
As student athletes who perform for this university, we would also like to bring this subject to the attention of our Rutgers family. We can use this as a way to get feedback from the coaching staffs, administration, and large athletic community. This university has athletes that do go into professional careers for both male and female sports, and also has sports that don’t have an option for a professional career. By getting information among our athletic community we can gain personal relationships between the statistics and numbers by also adding personal statements and interviews from coaches, staff, and individual student athletes.

A proposal and presentation will be made to establish and injury protection standard and plan to protect athletes from the pressures to return to soon from an injury, covering up or ignoring an injury, not treating injuries in order to avoid the sports medicine office, and to reduce or cancel financial assistance based on lack of participation or decrease in participation based on an unavoidable and directly related injury. These issues are all problematic inside each and every division 1 athletic program. With the lack of time and busy schedules that Division I student athletes face, this is a problem that not only desperately needs to be fixed but such student athletes deserve to not have to worry about their future due to an injury. Our overall objective is to bring more assertive concrete information to student athletes that will enhance the amount of knowledge that they need to know about this subject. Student athletes need to be aware and protected in case they encounter and injury during their years of NCAA eligibility. An injury is controlled by the athlete but if they are being pressured by administration and coaches to get the athlete back on the field, as quickly as possible they might not perform what is right in the long term for the athlete. Our goal is to create a safe method of giving athletes the protection and knowledge needed to prevent and deal with injuries safely and effectively during their college career, which we are hoping to have mandated by the NCAA.

The Service Project: Spreading the Message

Our service project included taking our information and film and getting it shown to the right people in hopes to spread our message and create a change. As a group we sent an initial email to Tim Pernetti, the Athletic Director of Rutgers University. This email explained the issues athletes, former athletes, coaches, trainers, and sports medicine personnel experience in relation to playing and participating with a Division I athletics program. We included the research we have gathered as ideas to take into action in aiding individuals who have hardships in correlation with participating within Division I athletics. This initial email mentioned that we have contacted various media organizations in an effort to spread our message so that the NCAA better accommodates those affected by injuries. Within a few days of sending this email, Tim’s secretary contacted us in order to set up a meeting where we would have the opportunity show our informative film and further describe our mission. Our group met with Tim the following week and educated Tim on the issues of untreated injuries, unprotected athletes, and influenced medical staffs. We emphasized our relevance to the topic, going into detail about our personal injuries and physical limitations. Next we mentioned the pressure and involvement coaches control when dealing with an injured athlete, whether the pressure is on the person injured or the trainer or doctor treating the injured patient. Finally we explained the insurance we are provided as current student-athletes, and the non-existing insurance existing for after we graduate and still encounter athletic-related injuries. Many of these topics Mr. Pernetti was well aware of, but did not full recognize the impact it directly had on his student athletes. We then proceeded to show
him the film, which documented several personal interviews of both Rutgers and non-Rutgers athletes. Tim was delighted to see that fellow student athletes took the initiative and time to show him the problems an athlete deals with in accordance to injury issues and prevention. He mentioned passing the video around to the head officials and head coaches at Rutgers University to spread our message and see if anyone has the opportunity to directly assist in our mission. He also agreed to bring up the concerns at the annual NCAA meeting that deliberates this summer. Our video and information gathered convinced Tim Pernetti that there needs to be a change in assisting injured current and former athletes and to crack down on influential coaches and team leaders in the event an injury happens that needs to be supported.

***Please see attached cover letter sent to Mr. Tim Pernetti***

Anderson, Davis, Moran, Ghent
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April 11, 2011

Dear Mr. Tim Pernetti,

We are currently a senior student athletes at Rutgers University and have discovered an issue concerning injuries among Division I athletes that may better your overall department. We were first introduced to the problems surrounding injuries in college athletes after each having severe injuries starting from freshman year into our senior year. We care deeply about the health and well-being of ourselves, teammates, fellow Rutgers student-athletes, and student-athletes across the country. During our time in the Ethics in Science course this semester, we have been able to put our collective passion into action by creating a plan to improve injured athletes options and support services. Each of us has encountered different and unique circumstances concerning our own injuries, and we have a lot of personal and varying testimonies and beliefs that combine to give us a solid structure to base our research and analysis off of. Based on our personal experiences within Division I athletics, we believe that a system of support, communication, and protection should be put into place starting at Rutgers University and eventually within the entire NCAA.

We are currently compiling enough research, information, and personal testimonies to create a valuable proposal and presentation to show you and other top officials in Division I athletics. We believe that our experiences with injuries can provide to be a positive fuel for our project, in order to give us the drive and will to see a change come about. Along with the written proposal and visual presentation, we have reached out to four different renowned media outlets, including Men’s Health and Self Magazine, to share our concern and solutions to this problem. By getting our issue out into the public, we believe that we can gain more support socially and financially to further our overall mission of creating a permanent and immediate change. We feel
that you would be a valuable asset in order to gain an Athletic Director’s perspective and advice on the possible future of our project. We appreciate your time and would like to meet with you to discuss and present our mission to you. If you feel that this is something you would like to pursue, please contact one of us and we would be honored to accommodate your schedule in order to meet with you.

Respectfully Yours,

Kristen Anderson   Brittany Davis   Mary Moran   Eileen Ghent

Editorials

Women’s Health Magazine Editorial Submission- tellus@womenshealthmag.com

Athletic Injuries Causing Lifelong Struggles in Young Women

My name is Eileen Ghent, I am currently a student-athlete at a top Division I institution. Throughout my entire life I have participated in many different sports, thriving on the competitive and physicality associated with sport. I chose to focus solely on developing my speed and skills in lacrosse, a new and up in coming sport for both men and women. After achieving my most sought after goal, signing a letter of intent to play at the collegiate level, I did not know the full list of risks and obstacles that would be associated with my love of lacrosse. I was a part of a program that practiced, trained, and developed at the highest level of the sport. I made it through one full year of collegiate lacrosse, although only playing in one game, I was excited for the what the future would bring. Within a month of ending my freshman year, I had become aware that I would need knee surgery. It wasn’t a common injury like an ACL or meniscus tear that was a routine surgery; it was a rare bone defect that would limit my agility and range of motion and had no set procedure to fix it. I knew I needed every ounce of movement in my knee in order to gain more playing time on the field- surgery, in my mind, was my only option in regaining this. Within the next eight (8) months, I would undergo three extensive knee surgeries. The first two procedures were both deemed ineffective after being on crutches for 6 weeks each as well as weeks of physical therapy. After the third, and most invasive, operation I was faced with unsuccessful results and one grueling question: Do you want to continue more uncertain surgical options or never play lacrosse again?

Many athletes are faced with this same question due to the increasingly high demands of collegiate athletics. After days of going back and forth, I decided to take what was left of my knee and stay on the sidelines. The purpose of this letter is to inform the readers of Women’s Health about the issues that face top women athletes when an injury occurs and the decisions that they are forced to make due to the lack of standard protocol among collegiate athletic departments. There are many factors that go in to the type of treatments, level of doctors, and amount of options that a student-athlete is given by their coaches, trainers, and sports medicine staffs. In many circumstances, female student-athletes are at the hands of their superiors, who are often pressured by the business aspect of collegiate sports. When a top woman athlete is injured, not only is their athletic career in jeopardy, but also the future of their body to perform daily routine activities.

Women’s collegiate sports continue to reach new and higher talent levels, physical training regimens, and competitive expectations. As the level of play steadily increases, so does the amount of stress put on student-athletes to perform. When an injury occurs, this puts an athlete’s performance on hold and spot on the team in question. Elite athletes are often faced by
criticisms from their teammates, coaches, trainers, and doctors when they feel they are physically unable to compete. Coaches are often the biggest culprit of pressuring players to work through, ignore, or rush an injury so that they can get back on the field. This is evidence that collegiate sports are a business, winning and losing correlate to coaches’ jobs and reputations within the industry. Having the best players on the field, regardless of any physical or mental injuries, is the main focus of most coaches in order to maintain their jobs. Many athletes choose to not report or lie about injuries in order to keep a start spot, finish a season, and/or keep any scholarship money that they are receiving. There are currently no official, nation-wide, rulings that protect student-athletes in such situations. Women in top elite athletic standings suffering life altering injuries

When a student-athlete does report an injury, they are often treated based on their significance within the program and certain affiliations the institution may have with partnering doctors. Often times, the sports medicine office will have relationships with local surgeons, physical therapy practices, and medical specialists. This limits the amount of resources that will be made available to the injured student-athlete. Many student-athletes are not offered the best treatment because of these existing relationships, often times causes serious and reoccurring complications to their injury. Recovery is an integral part in getting a play back on to the field, but it is often neglected due to seasonal time constraints and specific circumstances that a team may be facing. Once a player is medically cleared, there is no guarantee that their injury will be checked on again by trainers. This is another contributing factor that leads student-athletes to accept the pain and work through excruciating problems. After a player has graduated, any problems that are a result of their participation in sport are not guaranteed to be financially and physically taken care of. This often affects the daily lives of student-athlete alumni, leaving them with lifelong problems caused by their mistreated injuries in college. Student-athletes are often pushed into making decisions that is best for the business, rather than what is best for the future of the individual.

A standard that protects injured student-athletes is needed to eliminate the amount of overwhelming negative outcomes due to injuries that occur in collegiate athletics. Something needs to change in the minds and morals of top athletic officials at the collegiate level. Sports can still be the entertaining, competitive events that fans thrive on, without putting the livelihood of the student-athletes at risk to future damage. Student-athletes dedicate their time, energy, and years of their lives to an institution, all financial, mental, and physical support should come directly from the institution not the individual, even after graduation. By creating more educational seminars focused on the different issues surrounding injuries in collegiate athletics, more people will be aware and able to prevent the negative effects of injuries.

Eileen Ghent
Rutgers University 2011
March 23, 2011

Brittany Davis
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Junior
Ethics in Science- NCAA Injury Support Program to be implemented for Rutgers Athletes.

Mary Diduch
142nd Editorial Board
Targum Editorial Office
26 Mine St. New Brunswick N.J 08901

Mary Diduch,

My name is Brittany Davis and as a part of my ethics in science class we were instructed to design and promote a program here at Rutgers. As a member of the women’s lacrosse team and being involved in athletics, injury has played a huge role in my life. Injuries in athletics happen often and continue to not only affect the injured but the entire team as a whole. Witnessing firsthand the effects of injuries on athletes, our group has decided to put effort towards creating and injury support program to be implemented here at Rutgers for athletes and their families. Athletes here at Rutgers have consistently suffered from injuries that require surgery, rehabilitation as well as lifelong accommodations. Injuries change people’s lives and the support of a program such as this will create a positive atmosphere for success and recovery.

After recent news of the tragic injury suffered by our own Rutgers football player Eric Le Grand, the need for support was imperative. An injury to his spinal cord has forever changed his life along with his family. After such a tragic injury occurs to an athlete, the team also experiences parts of the injury along with the athlete. Division 1 athletes dedicate a lot of time striving for perfection to succeed and an individual along with the team; injuries create a negative effect on the athlete no only physically but psychologically.

An influence on the athlete’s emotional response is the extent of involvement and time invested in the sport. Those who were more involved in the sport and exercise before the injury, registered higher levels of confusion and perceived their recovery to be smaller at the end of rehabilitation. A stronger connection between athletics and self-identity is created as the athlete invests more time in sport. For this reason, the emotional disturbance may be greater among those who invest more time in sport. Those athletes who posses a strong self-identity or sense of worth through the single social role of sport may experience a particularly difficult time adjusting to being injured.

Injuries leave athletes and their families in a state of shock and chaos. Every year, 3 million to 5 Million Injuries occur on the athletic field in competition and recreation. The programs plan is to accomplish success by providing education, resources, and support programs that offer a healing hand for athletes striving towards a positive healthy recovery.

Injury support is essential to those who are newly injures and their caretakers. The use of Peer-to-Peer support and other resources such as education to help them navigate their medical journey of an athlete with a trauma injury provide a community of support to those who might otherwise be isolated during a very difficult and stressful time.
Injuries that occur in athletes may also unfortunately affect them over a lifetime. These athletes pursuing life after injury need programs designed to help athletes discover self worth and value beyond their athletic ability so they can continue to live happy, healthy lives following a trauma injury.

The entire process of an injury is scary and poses a negative impact on the person as an athlete but also affects their everyday lives. Recovery is a long road that involves surgeries, setbacks, and rehabilitation. The most important piece of recovery is remaining positive and working towards success everyday. Incorporating a program that provides the support to allow recovery to thrive is essential to the success of athletes here at Rutgers.

Thank You,
Brittany Davis

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Men's Health Editorial
Noelle Tota
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My name is Mary Moran and I am a college athlete. A sports player my whole life, the one I chose to play in college is lacrosse. Since my body has gone through years of rigorous training, sprinting, lifting, and preparation for this level, injuries have occurred and continue to show up. From hamstring pulls, muscle tears, sprained ankles, and stress fractures I’ve had my fair share of non-surgical but still painful injuries.

When a player is injured, they are frustrated and irritated and anxious to become better, no matter the injury. There is a need in college sports for a program athlete’s can turn to in order to have support and guidance they need in order to remain (mostly mentally) healthy and stable for their return. Sometimes a sport is all an athlete has, and they feel identity loss without it. Sometimes an athlete feels as if they are letting their team or coaches down while they are taking time out to heal. Some injuries are career ending and athletes are therefore devastated and need to talk it out with someone. If the NCAA created a program in Division I institutions that worked with injured athletes it would have a very positive effect on not only college athletes’ mental health after an injury, but on their physical health because they would not be as reluctant to report injuries with an awaiting support group.

The NCAA is also in need of guidelines that protect student athletes from coaches, trainers, doctors, or any outside influence on saying when an athlete should take time off for an injury or is ready to return after one. Coaches seem to be a major issue in Division I athletics in influencing athletes. Players are reluctant to report injuries when their coach emphasizing “toughing it out”. Sometimes this results in further injuries. Coaches who want certain players in the game will finagle athletes out of reporting injuries or into returning early in order to perform, before they are fully healed. Athletes are constantly fighting for playing time and are blind-sided by overwhelming emphasis on winning for their coaches and teammates that they put their injury prevention or treatment in the back seat. Head injuries are where we see the most dangerous situations and side affects. When there is no proof of blood, swelling, or broken bones, coaches and teammates pressure athletes to play with a concussion. This can result in permanent head trauma for an athlete and is not worth the one college game they participate in for it. Guidelines
and rules need to be made protecting athletes from being persuaded to play or perform on injuries.

Finally, protection after graduation is needed for athletes. These players devote years of their life to a university to perform at a high level and experience severe repercussions physically because of it. These sometimes life-long physical ailments do not go away once graduation hits. Athletes will experience pain and discomfort in joints and bones and tendons a lot more then the average person throughout their life, and need to have assistance for it. Coverage plans need to be made for former college athletes that help them with the costs of doctor visits and bone scans and surgeries for the rest of their lives. These physical set backs are a direct correlation of the dedication athletes put into their Division I college career, and are therefore owed assistance in dealing with them for life.

Mary Moran
Rutgers 2011

Kristen Anderson
Ethics In Science
Editorial To Women’s Health Magazine
3/21/11

Dear Women’s Health Magazine,

My name is Kristen and I am an athlete at Rutgers University that would like to draw as much attention possible to the problem that athletes are facing most today and that is injuries. I am writing to you to spread the information and knowledge that most division one athletes acquire by spending four years in a close relationship with his or her sport and witness the terrible injuries that come along with each of these sports. The issue that my teammates and I are facing and trying to fix today is the lack of information provided to each athlete when either an athlete acquires a season ending injury and the pressures that each athlete faces when these injuries occur. Our mission is to research, introduce, and successfully add a new section to the NCAA Manual that protects student-athletes from devastating pressures and schedules they may face after encountering an injury. Through this web log I hope to let, as many people know as possible about the troubles that NCAA athletes are facing today. One of the main issues is neglecting injuries because of scheduling conflicts. Although the NCAA puts ample emphasis on the insurance coverage that is offered in different situations involving student-athletes, nothing is mentioned along the lines of protecting the student-athletes from ignoring an injury, going back to competition too early, or covering up an injury in order to appease pressures put on them by coaches, teammates, and staff. I am writing to Women’s Health Magazine because of its outlook and consideration for athletes. I think that this is a problem facing teams across the world and that in order to make a change we need to notify as many people as possible. I think that while also trying to add onto the NCAA manual we can notify as many athletes as possible about these issues and try and find help. I also think that NCAA athletes would benefit from any kind of injury prevention plans, and help groups that can be formed once a significant injury occurs. I believe that the biggest problem in our program today is that there is no where for these athletes to turn to once a season ending injury does occur. Do you have any advice for athletes that go
through these injuries? And is there any programs that you know of that could help any athlete recover mentally from injuries such as these? Any help that you could give would be gratefully appreciated.