

CERTIFIED ATHLETIC TRAINERS-NOW MORE THAN EVER

As proof of their importance becomes more widely known, their benefits far outweigh the costs.

By **P.K. Daniel**

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On May 17, 2016, 15-year-old Giovanni Pulido collapsed and died after a late-afternoon football conditioning practice at Encinal High School in Alameda in 2016. The official cause of death was sudden cardiac arrest after physical exertion in hot weather, according to the Coroner's Bureau of the Alameda County Sheriff's Office. Records indicated the temperature was in the 80s.

An Alameda Unified spokeswoman said at the time that she did not know whether the team had an athletic trainer on the field that day. However, Encinal's own reporting for census data gathered by the California Interscholastic Federation (CIF) for both the 2015-2016 and 2016-17 school years indicates the school did not have an athletic trainer on staff.

Between 1982 to 2015, 735 high school athletes died during and after participating in sports, according to the University of North Carolina's National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research. To make playing sports safer, CIF has enacted several requirements of its member schools. It mandates that coaches receive training in first aid and CPR, sudden cardiac arrest and concussion management. The CIF website provides resources for training and information about emergency action plans, hydration, heat illness, MRSA and more.

But what hundreds of California schools lack are full-time certified athletic trainers necessary to provide appropriate and quality care to student-athletes. The Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE) says: "Athletic trainers develop and implement strategies and programs to prevent the incidence and/or severity of injuries and illnesses and optimize their clients'/patients' overall health and quality of life."

The job of a certified athletic trainer, which requires a bachelor's degree with 70 percent of athletic trainers holding a master's, includes collaborating with physicians in providing preventive and emergency care, diagnosis, rehabilitation and other medical services. Not only are they credited with preventing injuries and improving overall health, they've also been able to save lives. The people they help aren't just student-athletes. Last year, when a spectator suffered



a heart attack in the stands of a San Diego high school gym, it was a certified athletic trainer and his staff who came to the man's rescue and administered life-saving aid.

While the number of California high schools employing full-time athletic trainers is increasing, there remains a large gap. According to information obtained through CIF Southern Section's 2016-2017 census, 75 percent of California's 1,600 high schools, which are responsible for caring for 800,000 student-athletes, do not have full-time athletic trainers. For example, \$140,000 in funding was made available for the San Diego Unified School District, the second-largest in California, to ensure each of its 16 high schools had at least a part-time certified athletic trainer last year. Some San Diego school districts, however, have been able to implement full-time athletic trainers by having them spend part of their day teaching sports medicine and physical therapy classes with the remaining hours devoted to athletic training.

In addition to the lack of full-time athletic trainers overall in California high schools, 30 percent are not certified, according to an ongoing study administered by the University of Connecticut-based Korey Stringer Institute.

At the very minimum, the Stringer Institute recommends that every school have an emergency action plan (EAP). This would include identifying who is responsible for calling 911 and relaying logistical information to first responders during a medical emergency. It would answer other questions, including knowing the location of the automated external defibrillator (AED) and stocked Epi-Pens and who is trained to administer them. It also would include knowing ath-

AN EVER INCREASING NEED FOR CERTIFIED TRAINERS

(Cont.): letes' individual health plans and if they have individual emergency action plans, i.e., an asthmatic athlete who carries a rescue inhaler.

As of the 2016-2017 CIF-sponsored census, the CIF-Southern Section high schools exceed the state average with more than half – 57 percent – employing certified athletic trainers. However, only 35 percent of those are full time. Additionally, of the 501 Southern Section high schools that participated in the survey, it was reported that 28 of the 180 full-time athletic trainers are not certified. That translates to 216 high schools, or 43 percent, that do not have an athletic trainer or that only have a noncertified athletic trainer. Of the 161 part-time athletic trainers, 28 are not certified. There are 160 high schools in the Southern Section without an athletic trainer. Nationally, 70 percent of high schools have certified athletic trainers with 37 percent being full time, according to 2015 data in the *Journal of Athletic Training*.

The reason anyone in California can identify themselves as an athletic trainer, regardless of education or certification, is because of the non-licensure status of the state. Because of this, California is the only state that does not require athletic trainers to be certified.



This, according to the California Athletic Trainers Association (CATA), can result in serious injury and death.

Tom Abdenour, longtime athletic trainer with the Golden State Warriors and former athletic trainer for San Diego State University, told the San Diego Union-Tribune: "In California, anyone can say they are an 'athletic trainer' regardless of educational preparedness or skill. Needless to say, this can put a young student-athlete at risk if the wrong person does the wrong thing at the wrong time."

CATA's long quest to regulate its industry experienced a recent setback when the author of AB-1510, which would have provided for the licensure and regulation of athletic trainers, resigned from the legislature over charges of sexual harassment, quashing the bill.

"We are moving forward with licensure this year," said CATA Governmental Affairs Chair Mike Chisar. "We have a new author (Kevin Mullins, D-San Mateo), and we will have a new bill number, hopefully within a few weeks. Realistically, this change will affect the early-year timeline in the assembly, but won't really affect the overall timeline through the Senate."

One of the main reasons some schools have hired uncertified athletic trainers in the past is cost.

"It used to be that someone could be called a 'first responder' and provide athletic training services without having the proper education and background to do so. Perhaps it seemed more cost effective at the time," said Heather Harvey, CATA secondary schools chair and athletic trainer at AB Miller.

"What is going to happen when there is a lawsuit and you have to pay out hundreds of thousands of dollars because an institution did not hire a full-time, certified athletic trainer to oversee the health and welfare of their student-athletes? I believe that the excuse of not being able to afford an athletic trainer at a high school is just not valid anymore."

Harvey said she has had discussions with athletic directors and principals who employ uncertified athletic trainers. "Their mindset is that something is better than nothing," she said.

Harvey, who disagrees with that sentiment, said parents should know who is responsible for the health and welfare of their children.

"You're assuming that whoever the school or district has employed to take care of your student-athlete knows what he or she is doing as it pertains to athletic related healthcare. However, that might not be the case," she said.