



MPHA Policy Forum Notes
The Teenage Experience: Teens and Sports Participation
September 20, 2013

Moderator:

- Dave Johnson, Supervisor of Epidemiology and Health Assessment at Hennepin County Public Health Department.
 - Opening Remarks:
 - No clapping, jazz hands because Kayla Meyer (on panel) is sensitive to noise due to previous concussions
 - Has two daughters who he coaches/watches in a variety of sports
 - Students who participate in sports are more likely to meet recommended 60 minutes of exercise each day. They are also more likely to be active adults.
 - There are also positive emotional/behavioral impacts for students who participate in sports.

Panel:

- William Picconatto, Associate Professor of Kinesiology and Program Director of the Athletic Training Education Program at St. Cloud State University.
- Tim Conboy, Assistant High School Principal and Athletic Coach at Rosemount High School
- Kayla Meyer, Senior at New Prague High School
- Kevin Merkle, Associate Director for the Minnesota State High School League

Opening Commentary by panelists:

William Picconatto

- In his position, he deals with a lot of high school athletes as they come to college.
- 10 years ago it was rare to have student entering college who have had a surgery. Now it is rare to see a girl in volleyball who has not had a surgery.
- Injury rate is increasing at alarming rate. Students are stronger and faster these days.

Tim Conboy

- When asked "Are the benefits worth the risk?", he would answer "Yes, generally".
- Stories of high school athletes:
 - Tony was young man who lived with grandma. When moved to new school, it was suggested he join the football team. This positive peer group changed who he was and how he acted.
 - Mike has mostly special-ed classes but almost always wears his football jersey. He has said that being part of team has had most significant impact on life so far.
 - Jason would come to basketball open gym and was pretty good. Unfortunately as a sophomore he was cut. This has had a negative effect on him and he is not the same kid.
- His football players undergo additional consequences when they get in trouble. They also do community service.

Kayla Meyer

- Started playing hockey when was 4. Played injury free up until 7th grade after practice

- In 8th grade year got constant headache. She told people about it, including her teammates. She didn't remember falling until the next day when her teammates told her. She waited for 10 days until she went to the doctor, even though she knew something was wrong.
- She can't play hockey until she is symptom free. She has had headache for last 4 years, has to wear sunglasses because sensitive to sunlight, and fatigues easily.
- These injuries have affected her academic and social life as well. Is only able to be at school for 3 hours and is not sure if going to graduate with her class. Her team has abandoned her, and she has lost friends because of her injuries.
- Wants to promote the mantra "When in doubt, sit them out".

Kevin Merkle

- Uses that same mantra
- Gets to manage concussion law. Getting better.
- Can be taught in other place, but maybe not as well.
- Hs league, hs coaches education program.
- Goal is usually to win, but purpose is life lessons. Need to get better when come to head.
- Overexcesses: Money (scholarship, etc). Tougher and tougher to prevent specialization =>skill level required.
- Injuries will occur, but have to keep perspective. Getting smarter=> coaching as were taught. Need to do progression, gradually building up physically even though counterintuitive.

Q1: Which sports are most prone to concussions. Do they differ between boys and girls?

William Picconatto:

- o In 2006, an online voluntary surveillance program for high school sports injuries where started. Called RIO: <https://highschool.riostudies.com/>. There are 108 schools that participate.
- o Only examined 10 sports. Football is still largest in concussions, but don't measure hockey. From 2006 to 2013 concussion accounted for 9.1% ->23% of injuries.
- o Most schools don't have certified athletic trainer

Tim Conboy:

- o It used to be accepted when kid got hurt at practice, now there is more shame involved because have control over more aspects. Kids shouldn't be getting hurt. Now there is more of a focus on how that happened and how to prevent it in the future.

Kevin Merkle:

- o Meet and review the RIO report. This report also explains how injuries are occurring.
- o It shows that females tend to have more concussions than males (higher rate), possibly due to neck strength? When focus on neck strength, have seen less concussions.

Q2: What do you think leads to the specialization of sports in high school athletes?

Kayla Meyer:

- o Everyone in family played hockey and lived in a town where the sport was popular.
- o Her family tried to put her into different sports, but she chose to stay in only hockey.
- o Believes that specialization depends more on kids, the family, and the situation they might be in.

Q3: How can help advocate being involved in more sports?

Kevin Merkle:

- o There is a lot of money involved in scholarships, but only 3-5% of high school athletes play any level of college sports.
- o 0.3% of high school athletes ever go on to play after college.
- o There is a need to educate parents that there really aren't many scholarships, and what is available are only partial scholarships.

- When looking at high school athletes and determining whether should only play one sport: can focus on “Top 3% (or even 1%)” who might have a chance (especially hockey) play professionally, often after playing in Juniors. BUT, especially need to focus on keeping those other 97% health.

William Picconatto:

- In Juniors hockey there are 60-90 games per year, therefore these athletes have to survive Junior.
- There are such things as “family advisors” who are like sports agents who coach student athletes how to interview properly, put together their best performances into video presentation. Can’t collect money for this, unless students make it. Focusing on getting to this stage add a huge cumulative injury effect and can mean a lot of time in the weight room, where there are often not certified individuals helping out.

Kevin Merkle:

- Another big problem is burn-out.

William Picconatto:

- Burn-out plus the belief that if they don’t make the elite team by age 12 they aren’t going to make it. Therefore these individuals are not going to put up with early practices, etc.

Tim Conboy:

- One of his sons playing NHL, but was a 3-sport athlete in high school. He played Juniors for 2 years after high school, then went to St. Cloud.
- Other son was also a 3-sport athlete. Left high school early to play in Juniors. Now in NHL.
- Always had mentality that when hockey season ends, it ends. This was because he knew about physiology and the need to have back-up plan.

Q4: What types of strategies can be used to use to build inclusive atmosphere and avoid negative effects injured athletes may experience?

William Picconatto:

- Athletes often undergo a lot of isolation once they are injured.
- Coaches need to make sure that these individuals are included in team. Make sure they stress these individuals are not just athlete, but are a valuable member of the team.

Kevin Merkle:

- The best thing to do is make sure there are things for them to do when they are hurt.
- There is the ability to do a lot of team building at the high school level.
- There is also a need to build school-wide atmosphere.
- This can be done at the youth level, but is best at the high school level.

Tim Conboy:

- Many kids aren’t going to tolerate hazing, etc.
- Make sure that there are lots of team building present. For example, his 30 year old son is still doing team building as he plays hockey in Germany.
- His head coach has those things in place now.

Kayla Meyer:

- She did go to games after injury.
- Coaches and teammates did try, but could have done more.

Q5: Tell us more about your group Connections for Concussions.

Kayla Meyer:

- Founded with another former high school athlete who has had a total of 9 concussions.

- It is a support group with 7-10 kids who come to meetings.
- Meetings occur once a month and last for about 2 hours.
- There is peer-to-peer and parent-to-parent support. They generally have someone come and speak about what is new in the in medical community and then break off for social time. Have become like a sort-of family.

Q6: What do you believe are top life lessons learned through athletics?

Kevin Merkle:

- Individuals learn about when you're successful and when you aren't successful.
- Mental toughness.
- Team building.

Kayla Meyer:

- How to work with a team ethic. Working with other people, which is an essential skill for getting through life.
- In school you can chose to be alone, but in sports you have to communicate with your teammates. Communication is also important.

Tim Conboy:

- Unselfishness.
- Confidence.

William Picconatto:

- Failure. This sometimes teaches us more than success. You also learn about how it shapes you.