

## **Sports Injuries – Epidemic or Myth?**

by William Ronald McKnight

Director, TIIPI

Recent reports by the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal Diseases and Consumer Product Safety Commission, reports 3.7 million sports related emergency room visits in children under the age of 14 each year, up 400,000 visits from the year 2003, as reported by the National Athletic Trainers Association in their press release of March 1, 2005.

The American Sports Data, Inc. suggests that no reliable sports injury tracking record exists, but that it is widely believed that sports injuries are becoming far more prevalent across all age groups. Of the 35-40 million annual injury related emergency room visits, approximately 10 percent are sports induced (an estimate confirmed in a pilot study of present research) which also indicated injuries that were deemed as less serious may not require ER treatment or may seek no or non-conventional assistance, may be 5 times as numerous.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reported injuries to children younger than 15 involved in 29 sports cost the US public more than 49 billion dollars each year. Today there are several large-scale injury surveillance systems, but not one is proven remotely accurate in painting a portrait of sports epidemiology in the US.

Regardless of exact numbers, all agencies concur sports injuries are on the rise. The rise can be attributed to year round training, multiple sport participation, reluctance of the child to talk about injuries, peer pressure, coaches and parental pressure. Dr. Lyle Michelle of Boston Children's Hospital says that injuries tend to occur over time as repetitive stress injuries. He further suggests that most injuries occur during training rather than in play, which would indicate that by being proactive there is a window of opportunity in which these injuries may be prevented. Doctor David Janda, author of "The Awakening of a Surgeon", finds that the vast majority of injuries are preventable. In recent years, protective gear, coach training and team training have been modified to protect the player, yet the statistics continue to rise. Janda details his fight with equipment manufacturers, insurance companies and the government to help make sports safer.

Shawn McCarthy and Ralph Nader of League of Fans in a June 8, 2005 press release calls for government led sports injury prevention programs, arguing that federal health and safety officials have been collectively deficient in research, data preservation, recommendations and that the government has been slow to recognize the magnitude of sports injuries. The government should begin a pro-active national program regarding health and safety in sports at all levels and age groups with the goal of minimizing the risk of injury to participants in informal and organized sports.

Bill Pennington reported in the February 22, 2005 edition of the New York Times “Around the country, doctors in pediatric sports medicine say it is as if they have happened upon a new childhood disease, and the cause is the over-aggressive culture of organized sports”.

Despite the federal governments lack of data on sports injuries, the CDC report touched on the magnitude of sports injuries. CDC reports that sports related injury places a large burden on the health care system for initial care, rehabilitation, lost man/woman hours of productivity.

Individual approaches are not creating significant reductions in injury. In upcoming next articles we will examine approaches to stemming the growth of sports injury and those that just give a false sense of security, like: **stretching**.

The International Institute for Injury Prevention, Inc.

THIPI.org  
preventionmedicine.com