

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Lamorinda athletic trainers behind the scenes



Chris Clark



Ray Albiento



John Grigsby

Photos Gint Federas

By Jon Kingdon

From the start of every sporting event, there is one group in particular that hopes to be able to remain completely anonymous – the athletic trainers. The last thing that they want to hear after a play is a call for “Trainer!” The trainer has to be prepared for every situation as a player’s injury may range from something as minor as a leg cramp to a life-and-death situation.

Though athletic training began in 1881 when Harvard University hired the first trainer, it has been a long and steady process for high schools, colleges and even professional teams to see the value of having full-time trainers on staff. It was not until 1959 that athletic training programs became available as a major at some colleges. As the programs developed, athletic training became defined as “health care professionals who specialize in preventing, recognizing, managing and rehabilitating injuries.”

High schools around the country have rapidly come to understand the advantage of having a full-time trainer on staff. In 1994, only 35 percent of the schools had access to an athletic trainer. In 2015, 70 percent of U.S. public high schools had athletic training services while 37 percent had full-time athletic trainers. Forty-seven percent of the schools reported providing full practice coverage each afternoon.

The Lamorinda schools have had great stability with their athletic trainers. Chris Clark has been at Acalanes for the past 15 years, Ray Albiento has been at Campolindo for 14 years and John Grigsby has been the trainer at Miramonte for 13 years. Grigsby was just awarded the Far West Athletic Trainers Association Excellence in Athletic Training Award for the fall quarter of 2018, which is given to the trainer who displays exceptional commitment to mentoring, professional development and enhancing the quality of health care.

Besides serving as the trainers for every sport at their respective schools, they all teach classes as well. Clark began as a trainer and took it a step further: “I fell in love with teaching. I have two sports medicine and three PE classes. It’s an introduction to sports medicine and showing them the roles that other medical professionals can play. My advanced classes are for students that are interested in pursuing a career in the medical field.”

Grigsby also teaches sports medicine as well as a class in human and social development for sophomores and he challenges his students to look to the future: “I want to see what the students know about technology. One assignment I give them is to try and come up with new inventions in our classes.”

Teaching was not something that Albiento had antici-

pated doing: “I never thought I would become a teacher but, with the opportunities to teach sports medicine, I found that I loved teaching. I’ve seen a number of my students go on to be doctors, physicians assistants, trainers, nurses, EMTs, dieticians and strength coaches.”

Though football is the only sport that is required to have a trainer on site for every game, no sport is overlooked, says Clark: “We cover all of our contests for us and the visiting teams.”

“We’re required to be at every event that is at our home field,” says Albiento. “We put in a ton of hours and it helps that we have a great group of trainers in our district.”

Grigsby welcomes the challenge of covering all the games: “It’s more of a personal goal for me to provide for all of the sports. We get a great deal of help from the parents and boosters who help to provide the necessary equipment and supplies for all of our sports.”

The ounce of prevention philosophy has become a significant aspect of the trainers’ responsibilities, says Grigsby: “It’s preventing the injury before it occurs. Strength conditioning is key to keeping the athletes healthy. We’ve found that increased neck strength helps to prevent concussion susceptibility.”

With the help of the boosters, Acalanes was able to hire Logan Beal as its strength and conditioning coach, who has helped Clark in many ways: “Logan has allowed us to institute a program of exercise prescription in preventing injuries. Our girls’ water polo team (which was undefeated) showed how important it is to strength train and maintain. They put all the work in with Logan and we found they had much fewer repetitive muscle injuries. We’ve found similar success with our track program as well. The athletes and coaches have bought into the program.”

Albiento has also seen a decrease in knee injuries due to their strength program: “We’ve seen fewer ACL injuries due to more strength and conditioning. Before 2009, we did not have a strength and conditioning coach. Now we have two. With our teams working with the coaches in the offseason, we’ve seen a major decrease in significant injuries when we strengthen their bodies as a whole.”

Football is the most collision- and injury-prone sport, requiring the most attention of the trainers and demanding their greatest efforts. “It takes a lot of preparation,” says Grigsby. “We’re the first to arrive and the last to leave. We oversee the necessary equipment, the water boys and girls and are alert to contact the first responders if necessary. On every play, I watch the athletes get up and down.”

The trainer is responsible for both teams when the visiting team has not brought their trainer, says Clark: “I will get

the Gatorade and water jugs ready for both teams. There are pregame treatments and taping and setting up the sidelines. I will have 10-14 of my students helping, studying and observing on the sidelines. I try to keep up with the game but the fact is I am concerned from the opening kickoff until the last play of the game. I hate to hear the call for a trainer but that’s why I’m there.”

With the advent of Title IX and the exponential growth of girls participating in sports,

the trainers work with the girls’ teams as well. Clark treats all of the athletes equally, regardless of gender: “Athletes are athletes and all of them are individuals. They have signed up to play sports of their own volition and want to be a part of it. There is equality in the training room. Whoever arrives first gets treated first. I was a trainer with USA Volleyball and have covered a lot of female-centered events and the exposure has enabled me to understand female athletes. Not

every athlete is created equal in their ability to handle pain, whether male or female. I’ve found that in many cases, the girls are tougher than the guys.”

As in most fields, things change and evolve, says Albiento: “A master’s degree is now required to become a certified athletic trainer. We’re not seeing as many multiple sport athletes as we used to. They play one sport and after the season, they will go on to play for a club team.”

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