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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

IS MEDICAL CARE IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS A PRIORITY?

RIIL and RIATA Promote Awareness During National Athletic Training Month

PROVIDENCE, RI (March 8, 2005) - It's tournament time in high school sports in the Ocean State when attention goes to that last second shot or big rebound made to win the state championship. Athletics are an important part of the high school experience for many students. Sports can provide a positive learning environment that will help student-athletes in many aspects of their lives. And like pep rallies and cross-state rivalries — injuries are an inevitable part of high school athletics regardless of the preventive measures taken. March is National Athletic Training Month and the Rhode Island Athletic Trainers' Association (RIATA) and the Rhode Island Interscholastic League (RIIL) want to raise awareness of the importance of providing quality medical coverage to all Rhode Island high school student-athletes.

"As parents, our greatest concern is for the health and safety of our children - on the busses, in the classrooms, and on the playing fields. We demand the best drivers, teachers, administrators and coaches, yet often ignore what is best for our athletes" stated Tom Mezzanotte, Director of the RIIL. "Certified athletic trainers are professionals who are licensed and trained to provide our student-athletes the best medical care possible and we shouldn't settle for anything less."

Results of a 2004 survey conducted by the RIATA shows a concerning trend in the lack of medical coverage in Rhode Island high school sports. Of the 21 schools responding, only 19% provide a full time certified athletic trainer for games and practices while 52% provide part-time coverage. This data suggests that many student-athletes are going without proper medical care following an injury in a game or practice, which may often force coaches to make medical decisions. Deciding whether an athlete can return to play after an injury is a critical component of the services provided by a certified athletic trainer.

According to Dr. James Sullivan ATC and member of the State of Rhode Island Athletic Trainer Board of Licensure, state law requires that anyone working as an athletic trainer in the state is licensed to perform those duties. "It is important for all administrators to insure that any individual delivering care to their student-athletes hold the appropriate credentials and they should never utilize any person to care for their athletes in situations when return to play after any injury is a possibility, unless the individual covering that athletic event is a licensed Athletic Trainer."

Sandy Gorham, head football coach at East Providence High School, feels fortunate to have a certified athletic trainer at all football games and twice a week at practices. "Our student-athletes work hard to be successful and deserve the best medical care we can provide," stated Gorham. "In the heat of the moment during a game I rely on our athletic trainer to determine what is best for our injured players, which provides me with peace of mind and the ability to concentrate on coaching my team."

A recent task force composed of experts from 17 school, health care and medical associations, who all shared the same goal of ensuring youth athletes receive consistent and adequate medical care while participating in practices and games, announced a consensus statement on the appropriate medical care for the secondary school-aged athlete. They stated that the medical care of high school athletes involves more than just basic emergency care during sports participation and should include activities such as rehabilitation, return to play decisions, fitting of equipment and other crucial aspects of ongoing daily health care. They also advised that an athletic health care team comprised of appropriate professionals work with administrators, coaches, parents and participants to provide the best healthcare system and recommended that all coaches be trained in first aid and CPR. For more information on the task force recommendations, visit http://www.nata.org/downloads/documents/Consensus%20Statement_Final%20Version_Sept02.pdf

George Finn L.A.T.,C., C.A.A., Director of Athletics and Student Activities at Barrington High School considers the importance of providing quality medical coverage a fundamental right for their student-athletes. “We strive to provide the best coaches and equipment for our sports teams. Providing a certified athletic trainer on staff is a critical component of our athletic program”, stated Mr. Finn. “Our parents, coaches, and administrators have the peace of mind that our student-athletes have the best medical care possible. The athletes not only have a safe environment to participate in, but have the guidance of a certified athletic trainer when it comes time to return successfully to athletics from an injury”.

As the winter season ends with the sounds of whistles and cheering fans, consider the healthcare provided to the student-athletes at your local school. The National Athletic Trainers’ Association has developed a safety checklist for parents to help them review their school’s medical coverage <http://www.nata.org/publicinformation/files/safetychecklist.pdf>

For more information on this topic or other pertinent topics in athletic training and sports medicine you may visit the Rhode Island Athletic Trainer’s Association (RIATA) website at www.riathletictrainers.org or the National Athletic Trainers’ Website at www.nata.org . You may also email them at riata@cox.net for answers to your questions. RIATA members are certified and state licensed health care providers.