I AM HAPPY TO PARTICIPATE IN this series on weight room safety and will focus on college athletic facilities. I have broadened the topic from "safety" to "loss." This allows discussion of several related areas (see Loss Chart 1) that may offer the greatest opportunities for minimizing loss when budgets and resources are limited.

My goal is to help you develop a strategic plan for minimizing losses to your institution's athletes, facilities, programs, and finances. We will do this with a large chart, as built from a series of smaller charts, indicating the possible places for loss. Modern business techniques such as formulating a mission statement and performing a SWOP (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, problems) analysis will be used to develop a strategic plan for reducing loss. This first installment will develop the beginning portions of the chart.

As a strength and conditioning coach, you have an opportunity to reduce loss in four basic areas: university and athletic department administration issues, sports participation injuries, hazards surrounding the weight room and hazards in the weight room itself. Each of these areas is within your domain. They are listed across the top of Loss Chart 1 from left to right in a manner of increasing influence.

For example, you have much more influence on the weight room than you do on the administration of your department or university, but you do still have some influence on the administration. If you can only go up against the administration for the most critical items, this series of articles will help you determine which items those should be.

University and athletic department administration areas of concern include personnel, policies, procedures, legal protection, and insurance. Not only does the administration try to prevent loss by hiring qualified personnel and establishing safety policies and procedures, it also tries to limit loss after an incident (legal protection), and to recover some of the loss (insurance).

Sports participation injuries can be devastating to athletes both physically and mentally. Not only do athletes need to recover from these injuries but they also miss out on gains they could have made if they were not having to go through rehabilitation. Sideline athletes due to sports participation injuries can be the difference between winning games or losing games, which today affects funding for the various sports programs.

Studies (1) have shown that proper strength and conditioning programs can reduce the number and severity of injuries and the rehabilitation time. This means fewer athletes will require rehabilitation, their rehabilitation time will be shortened, and the performance of the team will be improved. Few injuries occur in well-supervised weight rooms, so your influence on sports participation injuries will be an important component in your ability to reduce losses.

Areas surrounding the weight room have many potential hazards. Parking lots, crosswalks, stairs, building entry, steps, doors, locker room, restrooms, and showers should be monitored for potential safety problems. Slip and fall is a typical injury in athletic facilities. Be sure snow and ice are removed from entry ways around your facility and be alert...
for water and other fluids on floors. If a situation is eminently hazardous, clear the area, block it off, and render the area safe. Have your athletes report safety hazards to you, then summon the proper authorities so the hazards can be repaired. Your quick response in dealing with hazards around the weight room is crucial if you are to reduce loss.

Opportunities to reduce loss in the weight room itself can be grouped into three categories: fitness activities, management activities, and the facility. Management activities such as preparing workouts, maintaining the equipment, and teaching proper spotting techniques allow you to help your athletes use the facility safely and make the greatest personal improvement.

An analogy would be the plates on a weightlifting bar: If the plates on one side were the lifters and the plates on the other side were the facility, management would be the bar. The bar allows them to come together and work as a team. If the bar has weak spots in it, such as a lack of knowledge due to not maintaining a program of continual professional development, the bar may break and injuries can occur. You are this bar. You must continue to be strong in many areas to prevent injuries.

My next column will continue to develop the chart and identify more ways to reduce losses. The loss chart, when completed, will be used to develop a strategic plan for improving the safety of your facility. You may also find it useful in describing your job to others and in helping assistants learn their responsibilities in the area of safety. I hope this column has increased your awareness of some potential losses.

References

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