Weight Room Safety Strategic Planning—Part III

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IN PART I OF THIS SERIES, LOSS Chart 1 presented the four activities that fall under weight room management: health and safety, weight training administration, professional development, and vigilance. Here we will discuss potential losses in these areas and how to prevent or reduce them.

Health and Safety

Health and safety can be divided into five areas (see Loss Chart 3). All offer opportunities to reduce loss.

Disasters
Disasters include fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and riots. Take proper fire safety precautions. Have written disaster response plans in place. A combination of preparation, prevention, and rapid response will minimize your disaster losses.

Security
You are the front line security person in the weight room. Horseplay should not be tolerated. Provide lockers for individual athletes’ valuables. If women will be leaving the facility after dark, take proper precautions to make sure they can exit the building safely. Visibility of the parking lot from the weight room, leaving in groups, and optional classes in self-protection can reduce the risk of violence to women after dark.

Illness
Do not allow people who have cold or flu symptoms into the weight room to infect others. A sick athlete needs time to recover. Also, be sure your athletes are well educated about AIDS. Illness drains physical conditioning just as taxes drain profits. It reduces your potential. Don’t let sickness tax your athletic programs.

Drug Use
Be sure your athletes understand drug testing programs, specifically how and what they will be tested for, and any penalties to them or the team that may result. Distribute copies of the NSCA position statement on steroids to all who are interested. Encourage them to “stay clean.” Be aware of the signs of drug use, whether recreational drugs or steroids. Have a written policy and take immediate action once you have ascertained that an athlete is exhibiting these symptoms.

Nutritional Counseling
Make sure your athletes have basic nutritional training. Post information on nutrition so they can see it. Provide handouts and recommended readings. You might invite a guest speaker from the university or from your training staff. Teach your athletes about the negative effects that poor dietary and sleep habits have on concentration and performance.

Weight Training Administration

Weight training administration is the fundamental duty of the head strength and conditioning coach. The responsibilities can be divided into six areas, as shown in Loss Chart 4.

Workout Programs
Developing workout programs for teams and individuals involves selecting the proper exercises and

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intensities so that athletes will peak at competition. The exercises you select must be safely performed within the constraints of your program.

Supervision
Since your assistants are your representatives to the athletes and the community, choose them carefully and give them plenty of training and opportunities for growth. In turn, they will help you provide proper supervision of the weight room; this will reduce your losses.

Teaching
Initially it is often the head coach who teaches the proper techniques, which are later reinforced by the assistants. Teaching is done by “hands on” as well as visual methods. It is most effective to a team when it comes from a number of methods: demonstrations, chalkboard lecture, videotape of others or of your own athletes, posters of correct form, and textbooks. Be sure each athlete understands the correct technique for each exercise. Find the teaching methods that work best with your athletes.

Policy Making
Policy-making duties include who can use the facility and when. Address the following groups: athletic alumni, coaches, their friends, recruits, visiting teams and coaches, referees, administration, professional athletes, area athletes, and your assistants. Establish rules for use of the facility, post them, and hand them out to new athletes.

Several coaches make athletes run for missing workouts and for rule violations. If you employ such a punishment, make sure the athletes have a safe place to run. Written, well-communicated policies are a good defense against loss.

Record Keeping
Many facilities now maintain their records on computer systems. Make regular backups of the data and maintain a backup off site. If an injury occurs and results in litigation, records of your procedures and attempts to maintain safety will reduce the potential for economic loss.

Purchasing
Equipment purchasing allows you to improve the safety of your facility by replacing old equipment that may not meet today’s safety stan-
dards. Also, new equipment may help train your athletes better. But it should not be used before it is properly installed and athletes receive instructions on its use. Some vendors have product liability insurance that can guard against loss should an injury occur.

- Professional Development

There are many opportunities in a university community and through the NSCA to continue your professional development. Loss Chart 5 lists several of them. For example, you could develop your own professional library and obtain liability insurance. And like many strength coaches, you may be pressed for family time. So select activities based on their ability to help you reach your personal and career goals and which might also involve your family. The synergy of combining these goals will make your selection more productive. Traveling and sightseeing with your family to the national NSCA convention to present a paper would be an example.

- Vigilance

Once you develop good programs in sanitation, maintenance, housekeeping, and safety inspections, you must be vigilant in carrying them out. A momentary letdown can result in injuries. Safety inspections should be done from a checklist; they should be signed and dated by the person performing them. Many coaches maintain separate lists for items to be checked daily, weekly, monthly, and quarterly.

Have your athletes report "near accidents" immediately. Investigation and removal of their causes can prevent a real accident from occurring. If an accident does occur, determine the cause and remove it. In short, proper attention to weight room management activities will reduce the potential for loss significantly. In the next issue we will discuss the facility itself and how we can reduce losses in that area. ▲

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