Traditional Athletic Training Settings—No Time Clocks Here!

In late July, athletic training staffs in professional football are extremely busy tending to the sports health care needs of their athletes. Preseason practices for college football begin soon thereafter. Here at the University of Delaware, we've been fortunate in that we send several students each year to work as National Football League (NFL) summer and seasonal interns. I can recall my days as an intern for the Buffalo Bills back in the summer of 1983, between my junior and senior years in college. The excitement and enjoyment our students get from working at the highest level of a professional sport is unbelievable, yet it does not come easy. Nor does being an athletic trainer in these traditional settings; there are no time clocks around, and you leave when the work gets done and start all over again the next day. I know some naysayers out there will contradict my stance concerning this viewpoint, especially those who feel that restrictions in the number of hours should be in place for students enrolled in athletic training education programs. Unfortunately, sport-related injuries have no defined moment in time when they occur. Sometimes these injuries occur in the first hour of the week, whereas other times they happen in the 31st hour (or beyond). As good as we are and with skill sets unmatched in the sports health care environment, athletic trainers do not have magic globes that enable them to predict when injuries occur and when our services will be needed. The profession of athletic training has down times during the course of our daily routines, yet we must be vigilant and constantly at the ready for those times when our services are needed, especially in potentially catastrophic situations. For athletic trainers in traditional settings, there is no defined workday—“nine to five” is not part of our vocabulary!

One friend and colleague, Mr. Shone Gipson, who works as an athletic trainer on the staff of the NFL's Buffalo Bills, has chatted with me on several occasions over the past year with regard to the number of hour restrictions on student clinical experiences mandated by the Commission on the Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE). At the most recent National Athletic Trainers' Association meeting in June, Shone met with several individuals, including representatives from CAATE, and sparked debate and dialogue concerning the number of hour limits and restrictions for clinical experiences involving athletic training students. I am no workplace attorney, nor do I know the nuances...
of labor laws in place to protect workers, but my sense is that limits on student clinical hours stems from this bureaucratic jurisdiction. I certainly understand the argument posed and the concern that students working too many clinical hours may be overworked, taking the place of full-time labor, but personally I do not buy into that argument. The student experience may involve long hours, but long hours is the reality, and there are no time clocks! I vividly remember those long days during preseason football in college when some of the most notable injury situations came late in the day when had I left after a defined hour period, and I would have missed out on the most memorable educational moments.

There is no doubt in my mind that a balance between too little and too much regarding student clinical experience can be met. Hearing voices from the traditional athletic training setting, where there are no time clocks in place, is an important first step. We must preserve the traditional setting and way of life for many athletic trainers and continue to prepare quality students to handle the rigors associated with these types of careers into the future!

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