

METROPOLITAN PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD
Minutes of May 15, 2012

Location: Recreation Services Offices at Balloon Fiesta Park, Upstairs Balcony

Members Present: Amy Lahti, Vice-Chair; Rebecca L. Tays; Kelly Gossett; Carmen Garcia, Dan Wilkinson

Members Excused/Absent: William Kraemer, Chair; Jerry Worrall; Janet Harrington

City Staff Present: Kristy Diaz-Trahan, Manager, Recreation Services Division; Christina Sandoval, CIP Program Manager; Jane Trujillo, Board Secretary

Visitors: None

Call to Order: Amy Lahti called the meeting to order at 11:08 AM.

Approval of Today's Agenda: Ms. Lahti requested a motion to approve the Agenda. Kelly Gossett moved approval; Carmen Garcia seconded; the board unanimously approved the motion.

Approval of Minutes: Ms. Lahti requested a motion to approve the April 2012 Minutes. Kelly Gossett moved approval; Carmen Garcia seconded; the board unanimously approved the motion.

Introduction of Visitors and Guests: None

Announcements: Amy Lahti asked everyone to keep Mr. Kraemer in their thoughts. The Board will also be attending the New Mexico Games Opening Ceremonies which are being held at this facility at 11:30. Amy Lahti mentioned that the Board did not have a quorum at this meeting and is unable to vote on Action Items.

General Public Testimony: None

Action Items:

- Concussions in Sports – Kristy Diaz-Trahan, mentioned that Recreation Division works closely with the Blue Ribbon Sports Committee and Albuquerque Public Schools. The Blue Ribbon Sports Committee works to put kids and adults in public parks for organized sports. At recent meetings, she has talked with the Blue Ribbon Sports Committee regarding a policy on background checks and concussions. There are 16 groups involved with Blue Ribbon Sports Committee. Of those groups, 8 have responded to request for information concerning policies on background checks and concussions. All 8 of these groups have background policies and 7 have concussion policies. Kristy has requested that all groups submit information by July before they are assigned a park. She wants to develop a baseline. She distributed an article entitled "Concussions in Youth Sports" from the December issues of NPRA Monthly Catalog (copy attached). She discussed this matter with Board Members. Suggestions were provided such as providing clinics or seminars for groups provide information/education on this subject. Kristy will gather additional information and provide it to the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board at a future meeting. She also mentioned that she would like to include the subject of concussions in the

2013 NMRPA Conference which would include Parks and Recreation groups from throughout New Mexico.

Reports:

- Barbara Baca, Director for Parks and Recreation Department was not in attendance at this meeting. Christina Sandoval expressed appreciation to Board Members that attended a recent Council Meeting in support of the Parks and Recreation Department. The meeting went well. Budget mark up is scheduled for this week with final adoption scheduled for next week. The Board will be contacted if additional assistance is needed. Parks and Recreation Department is working on the Recreation Guide which should be posted on the web soon. The Department is preparing for summer activities.
- Balloon Fiesta Commission Representative - Bill Nordin mentioned he will provide information at the June meeting.
- Sub-Committee Reports – None
- Members Roundtable – Rebecca Tays, District 8, expressed appreciation to Barbara Baca for coordinating a meeting in the El Oso Grande Park Natural Space. Open Space, Water Utility Authority and Park Management were represented at the meeting and Rebecca Tays stated that “things are happening”.

Unfinished Business: We have vacancies in Districts 3, 5 and 6.

New Business: Ms. Lahti mentioned a joint meeting between this Board and the Open Space Advisory Board. Board Members discussed a possible joint meeting in September.

The next Board Meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 19, 2012, at TBD.

Adjourn: Ms. Lahti adjourned the meeting at 12:11 PM.

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WHO, WHAT, WHERE & HOW—AROUND THE PARKS

Concussions in Youth Sports

Dealing with a dangerous headache

By Matt Terl

When Shane Caswell was a high school hockey player in upstate New York, a dirty hit put him headfirst into the boards, knocking him out. He quickly regained consciousness and skated off to the bench.

"When I went back to the bench, I got very emotional," Caswell says now. "I was crying, I was swearing, which aren't normal behaviors for me. And in retrospect, I couldn't see and was having visual disturbances."

Today, these symptoms would immediately indicate concussion. In 1991, Caswell's coach put him back into the game almost immediately, only taking him out when it was clear that his disorientation was severe enough that he couldn't contribute.

"There was no medical care," Caswell says, "and really no understanding at the time of what a concussion was."

Caswell was fortunate and escaped with no ill effects, but the

incident haunted him. Which is part of how he wound up as Dr. Caswell, in charge of the Sports Medicine Assessment Research and Testing (SMART) Laboratory at George Mason University, a multi-disciplinary sports medicine lab focused on injury prevention and human performance. One of Caswell's specialties is, of course, concussions.

It's a lively field to be involved in at the moment, at all levels of sport. Professional sports leagues have made strides to improve concussion awareness and regulate return to play. High schools have followed suit—and, increasingly, parks and recreation agencies are also getting involved in testing and concussion safety. Recently, for example, the Franklin Lakes (New Jersey) Recreation and Parks Department mandated cognitive baseline testing for athletes participating in their programs and facilities.

Cognitive baseline tests are used to detect subtle changes in the way information is processed by someone who has suffered

QUOTABLE

"I consider skateboarding an art form, a lifestyle and a sport."

—Tony Hawk

CONCUSSION TIPS

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS OF A CONCUSSION

- Headache or skull pressure
- Vision problems or sensitivity to light
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Confusion, disorientation, or memory loss
- A feeling of sluggishness or fogginess

STAY INFORMED

- CDC Heads Up Program offers trainings, posters, and more: http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/high_school.html

EDUCATE YOUR LEAGUES, COACHES, PARENTS, AND STAFF

- Attempt to form partnerships with head injury specialists and researchers in your area
- Youth sports players are among the most underserved population when it comes to concussion care, which puts them at risk for cumulative effects

ENCOURAGE LEAGUES TO HAVE A SAFETY PLAN, AND IF POSSIBLE, AN ATHLETIC TRAINER

EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF NEW EQUIPMENT

- Helmet technology and concussion knowledge are always changing. "The best helmet is a new helmet," Dr. Caswell says.

KNOW LOCAL CONCUSSION LAWS

- Return to play laws vary by region. Know your regional requirements and be sure your leagues follow them.

WHEN IN DOUBT, HOLD THEM OUT

- Encourage your leagues to limit return to play if there is any question of a player's fitness.
- Do not allow same day return to play for any concussions, and require players to see their own qualified medical professional.

a concussion. The test is first taken while healthy, establishing a baseline, and administered again as one of the final steps in determining when someone is no longer suffering a concussion's effects.

As public concern over concussions grows, other parks and recreation administrators and staffers might naturally be inclined to follow Franklin Lakes' lead.

Which might not be the best idea.

"These exams are a tool," Caswell explains. "They are designed to be used by a qualified and well-trained healthcare professional who understands concussions. They're really not intended to be used by untrained and unqualified non-medical professionals, such as coaches, parents, and administrators."

James Kozlowski, an attorney specializing in the legal aspects of parks and recreation administration (and a regular *Parks & Recreation* contributor), agrees. "Right now I don't think it is the community's responsibility for doing it,"

Kozlowski says. "Just because some people are doing it doesn't mean you're negligent for not doing it."

In fact, Kozlowski explains, adding this requirement might open parks and rec agencies to more liability rather than less.

"In this whole area oftentimes less is more," he says. "At this point in time, there's no requirement that that be done. But if you assume that you're going to do it, you'd better do it right."

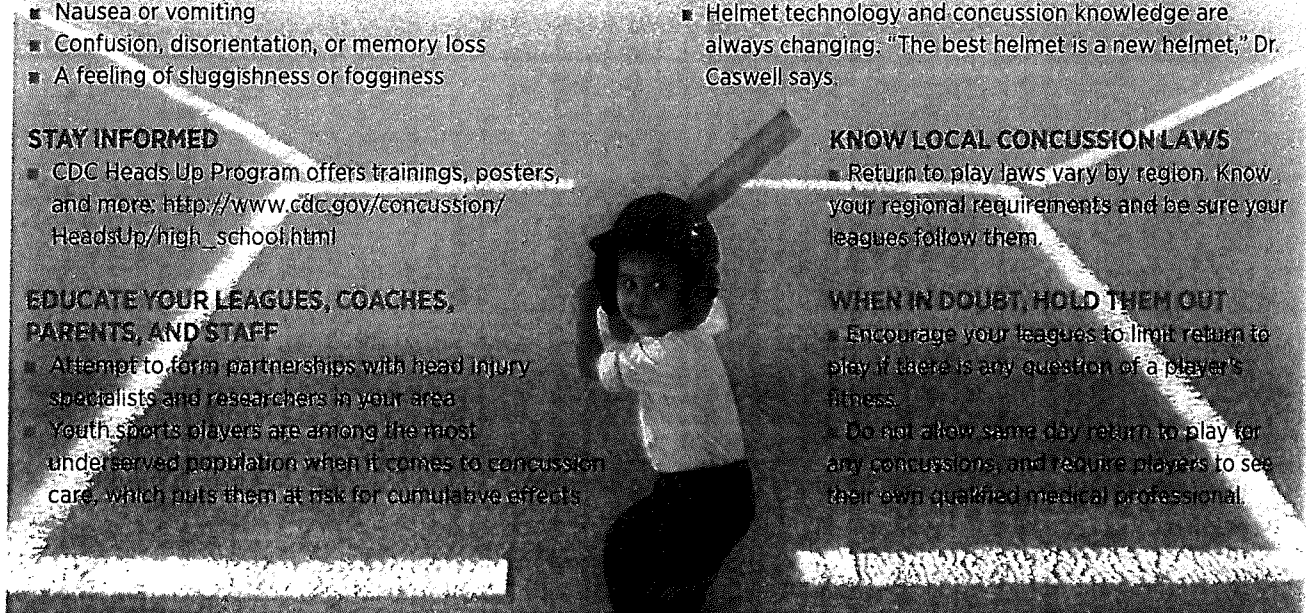
The popularity of cognitive baseline tests (ImPACT being the best-known brand) stems partly from their use on the professional level. But even NFL athletic trainers express skepticism that these tests are the best way to help younger athletes.

According to Larry Hess, head athletic trainer for the Washington Redskins,

"The biggest thing now is heightened awareness. There's more awareness of the signs and symptoms and more education, and I think that's what we have to get across to the youth athletes and the people that are around them every day."

Again, Caswell agrees. SMART Lab has partnered with Central Loudoun (Virginia) Youth Football, a nonprofit league for ages 6-14 that uses municipal fields, and implemented a more holistic approach to concussions and sports injuries. The league maintains a safety commissioner, handling general league safety procedures, and has entered into an affiliate agreement with George Mason University, paying a portion of the tuition for one of Caswell's graduate assistants—a Certified Athletic Trainer—to serve as the medical authority at nearly all of their league games.

"There are multiple benefits," league president Roly Rigual explains. "Not only do we get the benefit and security of having a medically trained person at these



contact games in case something really bad happens, but we're collecting data," which will be used in the future to identify trends and minimize risks.

Caswell has helped the league set up an online injury monitoring system, even tracking injuries incurred in practice. He has also provided mandatory coaching safety training, which he believes is the most important element parks and rec staffs can offer to their leagues and athletes. Specifically, Caswell believes that annual safety education sessions should be mandatory for coaches.

"Annual because the science is continually changing, particularly with regard to concussions," Caswell says.

One place where the education approach has worked well is the Newtown Township (Pennsylvania) Parks and Recreation department, which in September partnered with Princeton Brain and Spine Care (PBSC) for a Concussion and Brain

Injury Symposium.

Dr. Nirav Shah, a neurosurgeon and head of the Concussion Clinic at PBSC, helped to spearhead the event.

"One key resource that was very important was the parks and recreation department," Shah explains. "What they were able to do was get the word out to the parents, to the children, to get us in front of the local youth leagues, and really galvanize interest in the community—which is the most important thing you need for something like this."

The event was targeted at coaches, medical professionals, and parents of young athletes, and featured a roundtable discussion, a Q&A session, and a concussion care expo.

Newtown parks director Kathy Pawlenko judged the event a tremendous success. "I was so proud to be a part of this," Pawlenko says. "It's really raised the

awareness in our community."

In the end, though, the education begins with one simple phrase: "Err on the side of caution," Caswell says.

Everyone around the league should be made aware of the classic symptoms of concussion; CDC offers free kits, training, posters, and more through its Heads Up program, which is an excellent place for parks and rec administrators to start, even if connecting with local medical professionals and organizing symposia is impractical.

Being let back out on the ice with a concussion wound up okay for Dr. Shane Caswell, but there is no reason that any modern athlete should face that kind of risk today. *

MATT TERL is a freelance writer living in Northern Virginia with a specialty in sports.

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