

HEALTH SYSTEM PROVIDES CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT PROGRAM TO LOCAL ATHLETES

You've heard them called "bell ringers" or "dings" – casual words to describe a mild concussion experienced by athletes while playing contact or collision sports. But concussions are never a trivial event. The possibility of long-term cognitive damage is real and potentially catastrophic if athletes don't fully recover before returning to play.

That's why Southeast Georgia Health System provides a comprehensive concussion management program to local high schools and the College of Coastal Georgia. The program includes full-time on-site athletic trainers at Brunswick High School, Glynn Academy, Frederica Academy, McIntosh County Academy and the College of Coastal Georgia, and medical supervision provided by physicians at Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery. In Camden County, the school system's athletic trainer utilizes Southeast Georgia Health System's concussion management program under the medical supervision of Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery.

"The goal is to ensure proper management of the concussion so the students can not only return to play safely, but avoid any long-term complications from the injury," says Beau Sasser, M.D., who oversees the concussion management program. He is a board-certified orthopaedic surgeon with fellowship-training in sports medicine. Dr. Sasser and Frank Clements, PA-C, who provides sports medicine coverage in Camden county, are both certified in concussion management.

"Initially our primary concern about sending back athletes too early was the catastrophic event where the kid gets a second hit. This is called second impact syndrome and it has a high mortality rate," says Dr. Sasser. "However, we are also finding that even grade one concussions, what used to be called bell ringers, can have a cumulative effect if an athlete is not allowed time to heal."

Chip McCarty, M.Ed., ATC, LAT, athletic trainer at McIntosh County Academy, begins administering a baseline ImPACT concussion test to an athlete. This test measures verbal and visual memory, as well as processing speed and reaction time up to 1/100th of a second. The results of this baseline exam will be compared to a post-concussion ImPACT test in the event of a traumatic brain injury to the player.



Dr. Sasser explains that if a player gets concussion-like symptoms, a sideline assessment is performed. If a concussion is suspected, the student is not allowed to return to play for the rest of the game. The first line of treatment for concussion includes brain rest where the athlete refrains from activities that require mental exertion such as video games, texting, driving and watching TV. The athlete is then gradually reintroduced to physical activities to make sure there are no recurrent symptoms before being cleared to return to the sport.

A powerful tool that Southeast Georgia Health System provides free of charge to the school systems is ImPACT® Testing, a scientifically validated computerized concussion system. ImPACT is a 20-minute test that measures multiple aspects of an athlete's cognitive function including attention span, working memory, reaction time and non-verbal problem-solving.

Athletic trainers at the schools administer a baseline ImPACT test to student athletes who are involved in contact or collision sports prior to the playing season. If suspected concussion is sustained, the athlete is retested within 24 hours of the injury and the results are compared. The test is then re-administered at various times during the student's recovery and the results are used, along with clinical assessments, to determine when the athlete is ready to return to play.

Mr. Clements, the physician assistant who works with Camden County High School, says, "Where I find ImPACT to be the most helpful is with convincing parents that their kid is not ready to return to play. It helps to show the parents their kid's pretest scores and the current scores. The key is to make sure an athlete is completely recovered from his concussion regardless of his responsibilities to the team."

Chip McCarty, who works at McIntosh County Academy, is one of the certified athletic trainers em-

ployed by Southeast Georgia Health System. He says the Health System is in the forefront in Georgia for providing the support and resources necessary to help protect kids who experience sports-related concussions. Currently, Georgia is one of only a handful of states that does not have legislation in place regarding concussion management, a status he is working with others in the Georgia Concussion Coalition to change. A bill was introduced last year but failed to pass.

Mr. McCarty says, "We are providing the same level of concussion management in our high schools that is provided to athletes in the NFL and Division I universities. It is comforting as an athletic trainer to know that I have both the Health System and the school system behind me, as well as great coaches, so that there is never a question about doing what is best for the kid's safety." ❧

Meet Dr. Beau Sasser

Beau Sasser, M.D., is a native of Glynn County and a graduate of Glynn Academy. He received his undergraduate degree from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and his medical doctorate degree from the Medical College of Georgia, where he also completed both his internship and orthopaedic residency.



Following his residency, Dr. Sasser received exclusive sports medicine training while in a fellowship program with the Kansas City Orthopaedic Institute. During his time there, he worked with the NFL's Kansas City Chiefs, treating a variety of sports and orthopaedic injuries incurred by these elite athletes.

Dr. Sasser returned to Glynn County in 2005 and joined Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery, where he specializes in sports medicine. At Southeast Georgia Health System, Dr. Sasser is a key orthopaedic surgeon at the Orthopaedic & Spine Center and serves as medical director of Sports Medicine. Dr. Sasser is board-certified with the American Board of Orthopaedic Surgery.

Summit Sports Medicine & Orthopaedic Surgery is a strategic affiliate of Southeast Georgia Health System and has three convenient locations. For more information, call 912-262-9961 in Brunswick, 912-466-5570 on St. Simons Island, or 912-576-6355 in St. Marys.

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