



A CERTIFIED ATHLETIC TRAINER

“No, not a personal trainer!”

Injuries sustained by athletes are numerous and frequent. Whether you are an elite professional athlete, a young and aspiring athlete, or just competitive by nature and enjoy intense physical activity, when you are injured the only thing you think about is, “How quickly can I get back?”

Over the years, as sports grew from fun to fierce the demands on athletes also increased. Coaches need their players to be healthy and actively participating at all times, and athletes equally need to be on the field sharpening their skills. Avoiding injuries, particularly in high-contact sports like rugby and taekwondo, or football and basketball is impossible. Even non-contact sports like tennis and cycling are prone to certain injuries. The only practical solutions

therefore, are (1) to make sure to be as healthy and fit as possible for competition. This is where the *personal trainer* comes in and (2) in the event of an injury, to facilitate and enhance the healing process of the body so that injuries are dealt with and overcome quickly. This is where the *athletic trainer* comes in.

The National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) describes athletic trainers as “health care professionals who specialize in preventing, recognizing, managing and rehabilitating injuries that result from physical activity.” It was out of the growing demand for rapid recovery from injury that athletic trainers were born. In 1950 the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) was formed in Kansas City, U.S.A. Standards were set

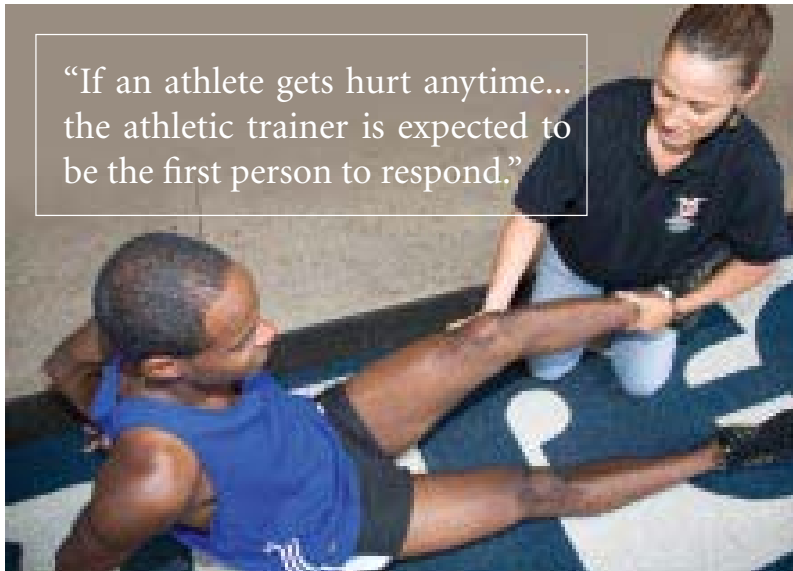
for professionalism, education, research and certification as is required by any other occupation worthy of professional recognition. The academic requirements for this profession are no simple task to complete. To become a certified athletic trainer requires a bachelor's degree in Athletic Training from a college/university, hundreds of observation hours and the successful completion of the board exam set by the NATA Board of Certification (NATABOC) following that four-year degree.

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that certification, there are continuing education units that must be maintained in order to keep certification current. This ensures that all athletic trainers certified by the NATA remain aware of the latest in rehabilitation techniques and related scientific studies.

Athletic Trainers that work full-time with a team are expected to be present during all training sessions and games, whether at home or away. Where the team goes, the trainer goes! If an athlete gets hurt anytime during these sessions, the athletic trainer is expected to be the first person to respond. In the event of a new injury, the athlete will be diagnosed by the team physician and referred accordingly. The athletic trainer will then plan and execute the appropriate therapy, keeping record of all treatment done as well as the athlete's response to treatment, permitting accurate tracking of progress made. An athletic trainer working full-time with a team, works so closely with the athletes that he/she puts in just as many hours as the athlete if not more, depending on the number of athletes for which he/she is responsible.

Modalities used by athletic trainers to facilitate the body's healing process can be as simple as ice bags to as complex as

computerised isokinetic machines. Electric stimulation and ultrasound are forms of electronically operated therapeutic modalities commonly found in any athletic training clinic. These can be used for pain modulation, inflammation reduction, muscle re-education and a host of other things. Understanding how to apply the settings is critical – wrong settings can be the difference between one week or one month out of play.

Proper rehabilitation is extremely important especially to those athletes at the professional level on contracts or the college or university student on scholarship. College and professional athletes can spend eight hours a day (or more) doing rehabilitation depending on the severity and timing of their injury. Their rehabilitation programme is carefully planned and structured to ensure that while the body is trying to heal itself, as it will naturally do, proven techniques of treatment and rehabilitation are implemented to ensure smooth and rapid progression through the stages of healing. Athletic trainers are commonly seen in the world of sports in the USA occupying full-time positions on sports medicine teams from the high school level to professional leagues such as the

National Football League (NFL) and the National Basketball Association (NBA).

In a sports medicine team, athletic trainers work under the direction of a licensed physician and alongside other health care professionals and trainers from athletic administrators to coaches. The structure and execution of a sports medicine team is relatively new to the sports world in Trinidad and Tobago. Ideally, it should exist anywhere there are athletes participating in athletic competition and especially at the secondary school, club or professional sports levels. For a sports medicine team to work and function in unison, constant and consistent communication between all the individual members of the team is required. Duties and responsibilities of each professional, budgets and finances for each area of interest, season's goals and other such issues should be clearly reviewed and understood by all. Sometimes areas of interest will overlap among the professionals, therefore preliminary discussions help minimize conflict and establish communication lines. Such action exhibits a clear appreciation and respect for the importance of each individual's role on the medical team.

At the UWI SPEC we appreciate the need to develop this aspect of the sports industry and, therefore, are planning to introduce an Athletic Training program so that anyone interested in this type of therapy with a passion for sports and/or sports science will have an opportunity to explore. Acquiring certification from the NATA is the ultimate goal, but passing the board exam is extremely difficult. It requires your full commitment and efficient time management. Knowledge content is intense and observation hours are numerous. In the end though, when you become a *certified* athletic trainer, you know that you've earned it. When your athlete returns to normal activity in "record" time and makes the critical play that took the team to victory, you can feel proud. If you like the idea of rehabilitating athlete injuries, enjoy the sports industry, work well under pressure, and have a creative and innovative flare, this might be a profession to consider.



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